

Colorado Chris's Neck-and-Neck Chase!

BEADLE'S

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BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.

THE KING-PIN OF THE LEADVILLE LIONS;

Or, HEPBURN, THE DUDE DETECTIVE FROM LONDON.



THEN COLORADO CHRIS'S REVOLVER CRACKED, WITH SPITEFUL AND MURDEROUS ENERGY.

THE

King-Pin of the Leadville Lions:

OR,

Hepburn, the Dude Detective from London.

BY LIEUT. A. K. SIMS.

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CHAPTER I.

. . . WAS IT A DECOY?

PATCHES of snow lingered in the rocky depressions, and countless acres of it stretched, with dazzling whiteness, along the northern rim of the mountains. The breeze that blew, fresh and strong from the further heights, held an icy tingle, but young wild flowers were springing in the moist spots, heralds of the long-delayed spring, and mountain magpies chattered garrulously in the boughs of the aspens and pines.

Arthur Hepburn drew in the crisp air with pleasurable gasps, and urged his mettlesome horse along the stony and stumbling trail.

It was the Leadville trail of the early days, and traveling over it was an abominable work, as can well be imagined. Heavy wagon trains had gashed and seamed it; loosened bowlders had plowed and blocked it; fallen trees and boughs had tried to turn it into a turnpike of corduroy. Yet the horse, a mountain-bred animal, used to rough paths, picked its way energetically, and trotted briskly, whenever trotting was possible.

Now and then a broken wagon was encountered, or the carcass of a mule that had fallen a victim in the mad rush to Leadville—which was still a recent and notable event. And there was, also, here and there, a suggestive yellow mound, telling where a human life had been laid down.

The rider of the mettlesome horse, Arthur Hepburn, was a young man from London, with fair complexion and blond hair. Although his face was a little heavy, his limbs were lithe and sinewy and suggestive of much reserved strength.

Coming to a place where the trail forked, a look of perplexity crept into his light-blue eyes.

He stopped the horse, fumbled in a pocket, and drew forth a letter.

"This must be the place," he commented, scanning the written lines, "and yet there is no cabin here! That is strange! I don't think I can have taken the wrong trail! 'A mile from the big pine!' Yes, this must be the place."

He turned the horse from the trail, crowded it into the thick growth of aspens, and looked for indications of a cabin.

No such indications existed. No evidence, whatever, of human occupancy, recent or remote.

"The fellow was mistaken about the cabin, or else he lied!"

Again the young Englishman was on the trail, hesitating as to the course to pursue.

And, as he sat there, scanning the slopes and hills, a puff of smoke broke from a pine clump, a hundred yards away, and a rifle-bullet cut through the sleeve of his coat.

"Ha! A trap!"

The blue eyes blazed.

A glittering revolver leaped like a flash from the holster. It was heavy and long-barreled, and as true in its aim as a rifle.

"Two can play at a game like that!"

And an answering shot plowed into the piney clump, above which hung the curl of tell-tale smoke.

Again the rifle spoke. But, young Hepburn had thrown himself forward on the neck of the horse and the bullet sung harmlessly above his head.

Then the horse, stung into activity by the Englishman's spurs, sprung up the trail, straight for the point of attack.

"By the gods! if he don't hit me at the next crack, I'll down him!"

It was apparently a most reckless thing, this spurring straight at the muzzle of that hidden rifle. Few men would have cared to do it. Yet the young Englishman, with the blazing eyes, crouching low in the saddle,

with the revolver swinging free and ready for use, made the dash. His attitude was that of absolute fearlessness.

Arthur Hepburn had been noted for his courage during his college days in Old England, and had been called a fearless fighter in the latest African campaign. He had been in the thick of the fray, too, only a year before, when Englishmen and Arabs fell like reeds on the reddening sands of Egypt.

Again and again his revolver spoke, as he spurred forward. A spinning answer came back from the rifle; then the hidden marksman leaped from the piney point and bounded for safety up the bouldered slope.

Hepburn gave a gasp of surprise.

The man was masked.

Once more the revolver spoke; but as before, the shot was apparently ineffectual. The thick growth of trees screened the running man; and, under all the circumstances, accurate shooting was not a thing to be expected.

Nevertheless, Hepburn plunged the rowels against the sides of his horse, and gave stern chase, firing whenever he got a glimpse of the fleeing form.

It was a complete rout for the rascal who had aimed his cowardly missiles from the shelter of the pines; and who, even though thus snakily hidden, had not dared unmask his face.

The path sought by the fellow was too difficult for the Englishman's horse, so Hepburn was forced to draw rein.

In another moment, almost, the would-be assassin vanished from sight behind a ledge.

"I gave him a scare, anyway!" and an amused smile came to replace the fierce light that had rested in the eyes and on the face. "I'd give something to know who he is!"

He thought again of the letter; and, after a sufficient time had elapsed to assure him that the villain had disappeared for good, he turned back toward the trail, and once more fished the letter from his pocket.

"Now, what did that scamp mean by shooting at me in that uncalled for manner? Is this a decoy, meant to draw me within range of his rifle? Dash it, it looks like it!"

"Near the cabin, at the point where the trail forks, you will meet a man, who will show you the way!"

The words were read aloud, from the writing.

He was at the fork of the trail. No cabin was to be seen; and, instead of a guide, he had encountered a would-be assassin. It was very puzzling, and to be accounted for only on the theory that the letter was a forgery and a decoy.

Yet Arthur Hepburn thought he knew the writer of those lines, and had been led to believe that the writer was honest.

"It's too much for me!" he declared, shaking the reins. "I'll have to seek further information before trying to unravel it. If he didn't write this note, who did? Who else knew my address?"

The puzzled look was in his eyes, when he turned into the trail leading to the right, not at all sure that it was the one he should take, but anxious to be moving.

"Why did that scamp shoot at me?" was his reiterated thought. "Could he have mistaken me for some one else? I shall have to find out!"

CHAPTER II.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

AMID the stones and stumps, at the head of California Gulch, looking out on Leadville, which was but a short distance away, a cavernous mass of bowlders reared its unsightly head.

It seemed a freak of nature—the lair of some wild beast; and this seeming was accented by the fierce sounds that arose from it. One might have thought that a "silver-tip" had been caught and caged there, only that the sounds had something of a human tone, even in their wildness.

Looking in through the narrow stone doorway, where the light fell coldly and scantily, an animate something, in the form of a man, might have been seen; a creature that was, apparently, as much beast as man. The eyes were red and swollen; the clothing torn

to rags; the hair and beard matted. A creature that rolled its red eyes, and chattered and roared in a most inhuman way.

The roar grew into an angry protest, as a clattering of hoofs sounded on the slope; but the sounds died away, when a young man sprung lightly from the saddle and walked leisurely in that direction.

This young man was Arthur Hepburn, the Englishman, who had so recently and almost miraculously escaped the bullet of the rifleman hidden in the pines.

The angry look that had flushed Hepburn's face had gone, though the light of inquiry still shone from his eyes.

There was a house, or rather a cabin, not far from the mass of rocks already described; and toward this cabin Hepburn directed his footsteps.

He was bent on making some inquiries, and the cabin afforded him his first opportunity.

The noise within the stone house, or cave, might still have been heard, though faintly, if Hepburn had turned his attention in that direction.

Evidently the man-beast was not pleased by this invasion of the grounds he considered his own.

Hepburn might have passed the cave, without any knowledge of its occupant, but an interposing bowlder turned me from the direct line and veered him close against the queer building.

At that, the roar arose like the protest of an enraged lion; and, before the young man could throw himself on the defensive, or collect himself to meet this new danger, the occupant of the cave had rushed confronting into the path.

"Back! Back!" the creature yelled, brandishing aloft its ragged arms. "Back, I say! No one passes here and lives!"

Hepburn halted and started in bewilderment.

A glance into the red eyes served to show him that the man was insane—even if that fact had not already been demonstrated by the queer antics, wildly-waving arms, and threatening commands.

"I mean no harm, my good fellow," he declared, stepping back a pace and looking at the maniac kindly. "I just want to pass on to the house, to ask a question of the inmates. You will permit me to do that, will you not? I promise you, then, that I will go away!"

The tones were low and soothing, and such as he thought calculated to allay the madman's ire.

"Go away! Go away!" the man cried, throwing up his right arm, threateningly. "You want to steal my jewel. You want to rob me of my treasure. You shall not have it, I say! You shall not have it!"

He stopped as if he meant to spring on Hepburn; then, ducking deftly, he made a sudden dive, thrust his head between Hepburn's legs, gave a quick upward surge, and threw the Englishman, sprawling.

Before Hepburn could struggle to his feet, or get ready to meet the madman's dash, the latter was astride his neck, and battering him with his bony fists.

A loud cry of alarm came from the cabin.

Hepburn, who was as strong as an ox, straightened himself and lifted the madman bodily, jerking him around in front and holding him off so that the play of the battering fists might not be felt.

At the same time, drawn by that cry, he managed to glance toward the cabin.

A reddish spot flamed in each cheek; and he mentally cursed the tattered and hair-brained creature that had put him in such a ridiculous position.

The cry of alarm had come from a young woman, who was now hastening along the path, uttering comments to the frenzied assailant.

"Uncle Isaac! Uncle Isaac!" she screamed, panting for breath as she ran. "Uncle Isaac, what do you mean? Let the gentleman alone!"

A snarl of rage from the old man was the only answer, as he continued to swing his bony fists and aim ineffectually at the Englishman's face.

Hepburn pushed the madman further around and caught the battering hand, holding it in a vise-like grip.

"What do you mean, Uncle Isaac?"

"He is trying to steal from me!" Uncle Isaac howled, struggling vainly to free himself. "He would take the only treasure I have."

Hepburn could not, at the moment, see the young woman's face, or he must have noted the hot flush that suddenly suffused it.

"Let the gentleman alone!" was the sharp command.

Hepburn had got another and better purchase, and was now holding the madman away from him, almost at arm's-length.

"He can do me no damage, now, miss!" he stated, striving to speak in his usual calm and collected tones. "He is quite harmless, now."

He was aware that he was cutting a "pretty caper," as he would have termed it; and he was nettled, in spite of the *sang froid* that generally sustained him.

If the young woman had not been uncommonly handsome, he would not have felt so "cut up" about it; but he disliked to be made ridiculous in the presence of a pretty woman.

That she was pretty, he could plainly see, in spite of his uncomfortable and strained position. She was dressed very simply, but at the same time very becomingly, and her face had in it the freshness of a wild flower—the freshness of one of those mountain blossoms he had seen springing at the edge of the snow in the stony trail.

She was young, not over eighteen or nineteen, and, for a girl in her apparent circumstances, seemingly refined and cultivated.

All this he divined at a glance.

"He is not hurting me in the least," he assured, growing very red in the face, as he held the flailing hand of Uncle Isaac in his own strong and muscular one. "He is not hurting me in the least, I beg to assure you. I can hold him easily."

"Uncle Isaac, do you hear me? Let the gentleman alone! If you don't, I sha'n't love you any more!"

Her face grew redder, as she thus couched her orders; a thing Hepburn did not fail to notice.

Nor did he fail to notice the miraculous effect of the command, thus worded.

Uncle Isaac relaxed his hold, the flailing fist dropped at his side, and he grumbly fell back, looking at the girl as if he did not at all comprehend why such a command should be given.

"I'm not your watch-dog any more?" he questioned, with a pleading quaver. "You do not want me to guard you any more? Oh, God, I am to be bereft! I am to be bereft!"

All of which was very puzzling to Arthur Hepburn, who stood, glancing curiously from one to the other. He was too well bred to ask questions on the subject. He would have vailed his curiosity, but that was a thing beyond his power.

"It's all right, Uncle Isaac!" the girl explained, with a mournful peremptoriness. "I'm sure the gentleman means no harm. You must not bother him!"

Uncle Isaac turned away, with a sad shake of his head; and then slunk, like a whipped cur, into the cave, where he proceeded to vent his displeasure by a series of groans and whines.

"Uncle Isaac is in one of his ugly moods, to-day," the young woman said, excusingly, to Hepburn. "To-morrow, likely, he will have the temper of an angel. You must not pay any attention to what he did. He is not just right here."

She tapped her forehead meaningfully, and forced a smile.

She was evidently much discomposed, though, by the untoward incident. She saw that Hepburn was a gentleman, and regretted Uncle Isaac's indiscreet attack.

Who she was, or what she was to the man-beast in the rock house, Arthur Hepburn would have given much to know, at that moment. He could not think she was the madman's daughter. Surely such a winning creature could not be the daughter of an old tatterdemalion like that.

"It's a case of "Beauty and the Beast," he thought; and his wonder grew.

Hepburn lifted his hat.

"I must beg your pardon for coming forward, as I did, unannounced! I saw the

house, here, and thought to gain some information before proceeding to Leadville."

The moans of Uncle Isaac came like an interruption.

As he made the statement he drew out the letter he had consulted on the trail, and looked at it.

"I have been led to believe that, somewhere along this trail, there is to be found a man named John Munden."

Arthur Hepburn had a feeling that he was doing a very foolish thing in saying this. It was not the question he had first intended to ask. The assault of Uncle Isaac had "addled" him, in spite of his customary presence of mind. Besides, the beauty of the girl was a bewildering force.

She shook her head.

"I never heard of him. Perhaps father can tell you. He will be here soon. Will you not please step into the house and wait till he comes? I am expecting him at any minute."

Hepburn colored pleasurable, and proceeded, with stumbling awkwardness, to further introduce himself.

At this she gave her name as Nellie Tempest; and she likewise stated that her father's name was Job Tempest; that he was a miner and prospector; and that the insane man in the rock house was her uncle.

Her curiosity was manifest; and, by a series of seemingly artless questions, she sought to draw from Hepburn more information than he had been willing to volunteer.

All the while the impression grew on the young man that he had been exceedingly unwise in telling her anything, and he worded his replies with great caution. He had come into the Leadville region on a mission whose success depended largely on secrecy.

And, too, there arose before him all the while the memory of that letter; and the opinion gained strength that it had been sent to him as a decoy.

Still, he could not feel sorry that he had stopped at Job Tempest's cabin.

Even a casual meeting with a girl like Nellie Tempest was worth something. He had not expected to find such a girl in these wild hills. He felt that she was out of place here, and infinitely superior to her surroundings.

Hepburn was at that impressionable age when a pretty face counts for more than all else. He was struck by the girl's charms. Yet, he told himself his was not a case of love at first sight, and that she was not at all the kind of a young woman he would choose for a wife.

She was too much of a blonde for that. Being a blond himself, he had always fancied he would pick for a mate a decided brunette.

These were the idle thoughts that ran through his mind, as he sat in Job Tempest's cabin, listening to Nellie Tempest, as she prattled on about the weather and the scenery, and a hundred other trifles.

But, though he heard her, and joined in the inane talk, and laughed merrily, now and then, his deepest thoughts—his most serious reflections, were of the letter, and of the masked marksman who had fired at him from the covert of the pines.

CHAPTER III.

GATHERING FEARS.

ARTHUR HEPBURN was startled by the girl excusing herself for the purpose of lighting a lamp.

It had been shadowy in the room, on first entering it, caused by the pines near the door; and, now, as he glanced out, he was aware that darkness was really gathering. Time had fled faster than he had thought.

"I must be going," he declared. "I will return to-morrow and question your father. I did not know it was so late!"

He arose from the chair to get his hat.

When he turned about, he beheld a man in the doorway—a man who was regarding him intently.

The blood swept in a chilling flood to young Hepburn's heart.

He believed he saw before him the man who had fired the dastardly shots from the concealment of the pines!

Nellie entered at that moment, bearing the lamp.

"Mr. Hepburn, this is my father, Mr. Tempest!"

"Glad to see you," said Tempest, advancing and extending his hand.

His face did not belie his words. Job Tempest seemed really pleased. A grin, that was half a sneer, disfigured his countenance, though it almost instantly disappeared.

"Glad to see ye," he repeated! "Take a cheer! Tain't often that Nellie and me has company in this hyer cabin. Tain't very often."

He rubbed his hands, greasily, and tossed his battered hat into a corner.

Arthur Hepburn was perplexed and alarmed. He wished he had proceeded to Leadville before Tempest's arrival. He wished intensely that he had said nothing about John Munden. But he could not go on now; and he could not avoid repeating the perilous question. He thought that it would be useless to try to avoid it, for Nellie would be sure, he fancied, to tell her father what had been said.

"Is that your hoss out there?" Tempest inquired, shaking his thumb toward the doorway. "I low I'd better go and put it in the stable and give it a bite!"

"I prefer going on to town," said Hepburn, as quietly as he could. "I just stopped to ask a question or two. I waited for your coming, because your daughter said you would be here soon."

Job Tempest had taken a seat opposite, and his keen eyes were fixed on the young man's face. Hepburn felt that those keen eyes were looking into the very depths of his heart; and he could not repress the color that came into his cheeks.

"I presume you're not acquainted with any man by the name of Munden, living along this trail?" he asked, shifting uneasily.

"Munden? Munden? Lemme see!"

Job Tempest rubbed his nose, reflectively.

"Guess there hain't airy man of that name livin' hyerabouts. Leastways, I don't know of any; and I low I know about every feller in these hills."

"Thank you. That is all. Now, I really must be going!"

Tempest held him to his chair with that fixed glance.

"Nellie, hump around and git the gentleman a bite to eat!"

Hepburn sunk back.

"I ought to be going!" he protested.

"Job Tempest don't want any man to go from his cabin hungry, and I know you hain't had anything sense noon."

There was a clatter among the dishes, and Nellie Tempest's voice echoed the invitation extended by her father.

It has been seen that Arthur Hepburn was not cowardly. Neither was he vacillating. But, there was a seeming rudeness he did not like in refusing such an invitation, and the girl's tones told him that she desired him to remain.

"It will be all right," he fancied. "If Job Tempest is the fellow who shot at me, I don't think I ought to be afraid of him. The way he ran shows that he is a coward."

Without requesting further permission, Tempest went out and led the horse into the stable.

"The critter will be better for a bit of grain," he apologized, on his return.

Outwardly, Job Tempest was a type of the warm-hearted mountaineer, who will share his last bite or his last dollar with any one who chances to be his guest.

Arthur Hepburn's experience in the mountains had not been extensive, but he had already met a number of such men.

Still, he could not rid himself of the disagreeable feeling that Tempest was none other than the man who had tried to shoot him on the trail; and, as he sat there in the little room, talking to the mountaineer, he wondered—if this feeling were correct)—what had induced Tempest to fire those shots.

Tempest was undoubtedly a stranger. Could it be possible he was the John Munden Hepburn had been seeking?

The idea was not so preposterous as it seemed, for Arthur had no knowledge of the personal appearance of John Munden.

Then a sudden, and apparently a desperate, idea came into the young man's head. If this man was John Munden, or if he had fired those shots at John Munden's instigation,

would it not be the part of wisdom to remain there throughout the night and keep him under close surveillance? Such another opportunity might not come!

Arthur had ventured toward Leadville for the purpose of meeting and shadowing John Munden.

"If the opportunity offers I will stay!" was his resolve. "I will stay, though I lie awake all night with a hand on my revolver. Surely, that girl can't be Tempest's daughter!"

This was always his final reflection, when comparing the two.

Truly, it did not seem possible that Nellie Tempest could be in anywise related to Job Tempest. Job was rough, uncouth, illiterate, and in every way unprepossessing. Arthur could more readily have fancied her the daughter of the "Beast."

The invitation came, almost as soon as the supper was over.

"It's dark on the trail," Job suggested, "and you're a stranger. Better stay over, don't you think? We'll make ye as comfortable as we know how. We're not extra well prepared for entertainin', but you're doubly welcome to what we've got. Better stay over!"

Arthur did not want to seem too willing.

"I'll take a look out, first," he said. "Thank you for the offer!"

He wanted to get out of the cabin a moment, to think.

He found the night cloudy and the wind soughing through the pines.

He walked up the slope, debating what he ought to do, and in what way he ought to prepare for an attack, should one come.

He walked by the rock house, momentarily forgetful of its occupant.

But recollection was brought back, in a startling manner. There was a howl of rage; and, before Hepburn could turn about, Uncle Isaac was on his back.

"You would rob me!" the old man screamed. "Death to robbers!"

A series of excited exclamations came from the cabin; and, a moment later, Job Tempest, fuming and wrathful, hurled himself on the old man and threw him to the ground.

"You old devil! Git in that house an' stay there!"

A brutal kick followed, which Arthur was not quick enough to prevent; and then Job pushed the old man roughly into the dark and noisome hole.

"Stay in there; an' if ye come out again, a yowlin' an' scratchin' like that, you'll pay fer it! D'y'e hear?"

"He is not in his right mind," Arthur interposed.

"He knows enough to mind, an' that's a thing he's got to do!" Tempest snapped.

Arthur was made sick at heart by the incident. He was, also, more than ever convinced that Job Tempest was the would-be assassin. He saw that, under his pretended charitableness, Tempest possessed the heart of a fiend.

"Better stay over," Tempest again urged.

"Thank you. I believe I will. It would be difficult traveling to-night. I'll go on, early in the morning."

The sound of voices came from the cabin.

"I reckon it's the girl's feller," Tempest explained. "You'll find him a nice chap. His name's Truesdale, and he's the foreman of the Cheesecake Mine."

There was a momentary stabbing at Hepburn's heart. He had already assured himself that Nellie Tempest was not the girl he would choose for a sweetheart, yet it hurt him strangely to know she really had a lover.

Nevertheless, he returned quietly to the cabin with Tempest, and was there introduced to Donald Truesdale, whom he found to be a young man of between twenty-five and thirty, broad-shouldered and strong, and with the bronze of the mountains on his bearded face.

Truesdale shot Hepburn a suspicious glance, and did not fail to note that Nellie Tempest colored redly under the stranger's gaze. And straightway a fire of jealousy smoldered into being in his heart.

Hepburn felt this, and returned Truesdale's looks with interest.

"I don't suppose, Mister Truesdale, that you're any better than your friend Job Tempest; and I'll just keep an eye out for you, too!"

This was Hepburn's reflection, as he walked into the cabin.

"If I'm to have two to fight, I'll have to be doubly on my guard!"

Then his thoughts returned to Uncle Isaac, who had been so brutally treated by Tempest, and something like anger shone in his eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

A COWARDLY SHOT.

An upper room, looking out on a shed, had been assigned to Arthur Hepburn; and the hour was late, when Tempest, candle in hand, conducted him to this sleeping apartment.

Arthur was beginning to feel that, perhaps he had been foolish in his resolve to remain at Tempest's until morning.

He had not liked the glances given him, now and then, by both Tempest and Truesdale, when he was supposed by them not to be observing. They appeared to forebode peril.

He lay awake, with his clothing still on and the big revolver on the pillow, ready for instant use; and as he thus lay, he strained his ears to catch the substance of the talk going on below.

Not only had the covert glances disturbed him, but certain words that had been whispered into his ears by Nellie.

He had gone out to take another look at the night and to clarify his thoughts, when she had brushed by him, and had whispered:

"Be careful what you do and say! Donald is jealous!"

"Confound the fool!" Hepburn muttered, as the murmur of Donald Truesdale's voice now rose to him. "Can't he see that I'm a gentleman? Does he suppose, for a minute, that I'd try to steal his sweetheart from him? Can he imagine, for a moment, that I would have any such desires?"

This imputation on his character—for he so felt it—netted him.

And, yet, reflection might have shown him that Donald Truesdale's jealousy was, in a measure, excusable. Donald, who could boast no great beauty, who was not as learned and wise in the ways and in the knowledge of the world as he might have been, could not help seeing that Hepburn's polish of manner held attractions for Nellie; and the fear that Hepburn might alienate from him her affections, was reasonable, from Donald's point of view.

That Nellie had retired to her room in another part of the building, Hepburn was aware; and he was also aware that the talk now going on below, and which he was straining his ears to hear, could not reach her.

At last Hepburn slipped out of the bed, still holding the revolver, and flattened an ear against the floor.

"Who is he, anyhow?"

This, in a growling voice from Truesdale, came as his reward.

"I know I know!" said Job; and, to Hepburn's horrified ears, there came the scraping sound of a sharpening knife.

There was further talk, of a puzzling character.

Then Tempest's words came distinctly:

"I seen him down in the woods to-day. Between us, we kin git 'im. I don't think he kin git away!"

Hepburn arose, softly, and looked out of the window.

The horrifying discovery came to him that he was in a deadly trap. One of these enemies could guard the stairway, or approach him from that direction; and the other could prevent an escape by the window and shoot him from the roof, should he try to break out there.

A cold sweat came out on his forehead.

He did not dread an open and fair contest, even though there were two against one. But to be trapped and shot down like a wild beast, was too much, even for his courage.

The men were still in the room, as their voices came to evidence. He saw that if he wished to escape, now was the time. He could slip out to the stable, get his horse, and ride on toward Leadville; and be far up the trail before they discovered his absence.

"I'd better do it!" was his conclusion. "I don't like this thing of running away; but 'he who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day!' And that's what I

want to do, if I can. No use being killed, like a rat in a hole."

He was surprised to find that he was shaking, as if with an ague—surprised and chagrined, for he had vaunted himself on his courage.

He took hold of the sash; and saw that he could readily lift it.

"I'll bid them adieu, though I hate to go without saying 'good-by' to Nellie. What will she think of it?"

Then he stepped through the open window, out upon the low roof, and sought for a place by which he might leap down.

The moon had risen, and at times the landscape was illuminated; but clouds obscured the sky for the most part.

Sounds reached him. A soft shuffling, like the tread of slippers feet; and, looking down, he discerned the faint outline of Uncle Isaac, slipping stealthily through the room.

Hepburn drew back, with an uncomfortable start. Words were not required to tell him that Uncle Isaac was out there watching the window, with malevolent intentions!

He had not considered the interposition of Uncle Isaac in his reckonings. There would be three men to fight, instead of two.

There was a feeling on him that Uncle Isaac was scanning the low roof; and, as the window was still open, Hepburn crept back to it, and re-entered the room.

The shuffling tread continued; and Hepburn saw how impossible it would be to descend from the roof and reach the stable, while the watchful old man was out there.

"I'll have to wait," was his thought. "He'll not be likely to tramp about all night. When he crawls off to the cave, will be my time."

He did not close the window, but crept softly to the point where the voices had been heard plainest, and again lay down on the floor.

But he could not make out the purport of the conversation. There were words, now and then, that had a mysterious, and even a threatening sound; but Hepburn could not group them intelligibly.

However, he was sure the talk concerned himself, and that the men below stairs had made up their minds to murder him, now that they thought him in their power.

It was not a pleasant contemplation; and he was ready to curse the hour that saw him approach the cabin.

Whenever he looked and listened from the window, which he did stealthily and at frequent intervals, he was always able to hear the prowling footsteps of the old man.

And thus the hours crept by.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. It was one o'clock.

Finally, two o'clock came; then three.

All had grown silent in the room below. Uncle Isaac's tread had ceased.

"Now is my time!" Hepburn decided.

Forthwith, he let himself through the window; and, after a moment's hearkening, dropped from the roof to the ground.

The way was apparently clear. The house and stable were alike dark. Clouds drifted lazily across the sky, and the wind sobbed in the pine tops.

With the revolver in readiness for instant use, Hepburn cautiously approached and opened the stable door. The horse whinnied a low greeting. It was true, at least, if human creatures were treacherous.

He listened for sounds from the house; and, when none came, he hastily put the saddle and bridle on the horse. Every instant he expected to hear the old man's frantic yell, announcing his discovery.

He led the horse from the stable, with the same quietness, and by a roundabout path into the trail beyond the rock house. Still Uncle Isaac slumbered, and there were no indications of pursuit from the cabin.

The free breath of the mountain air was on his forehead, and it drove from him every vestige of the cowardice that had chilled him in that upper room.

"I'm all right, now!" he muttered.

Then, he swung himself easily into the saddle, turned his horse into the Leadville trail, and rode slowly and thoughtfully away.

When he had gained what he considered

a safe distance, he urged the animal into a quicker gait.

"Miss Nellie will wonder about my strange leave-taking! As for those others, it doesn't matter much what they think. If that fellow is really John Munden, I'll have him by the heels in a little while."

The moonlight shone on him, through a rift in the clouds, and brightened the face that had recently worn such an anxious look.

He was more than half a mile from the cabin.

About him was a growth of pines, and at the side of the trail a spring bubbled over into a rivulet. Just beyond was a dark ravine.

Then a rifle cracked, and Arthur Hepburn, throwing up his hands, fell heavily from the saddle, and the horse raced frightened away.

CHAPTER V.

A SINGULAR DISAPPEARANCE.

NELLIE TEMPEST was an early riser, and, before the sun had melted the frost from the tops of the pines above the cabin, she was journeying toward the spring, water-bucket in hand.

She had heard nothing of the shot in the night, nor dreamed of the foul crime that had been committed.

Her mind was full of pleasant thoughts; full of thoughts of Donald Truesdale. His words still rung in her ears, and his kisses still felt warm on her cheeks.

Notwithstanding the warning she had given Hepburn, she had no doubt of Donald's loyalty and honesty. All she had feared was that Donald might harm the stranger in a fit of jealousy. That Donald should become thus savagely jealous was rather pleasurable than otherwise, though it sometimes alarmed her.

They had had a long talk, she and Donald, and her eyes brightened and her cheeks flushed when she recalled what Donald had said to her.

The coming of a stranger to the cabin had brought Nellie Tempest great joy. It had induced Donald Truesdale to speak his mind more plainly to her than he had ever done before.

He had declared his love in unmistakable terms, and had asked her to become his wife; and she—she had coyly assured him that his love was returned, and had said "Yes" to his plea.

Donald had told her that he did not like to have her think too well of handsome young strangers, who might not be as good as they seemed, and that he wanted her love and the sunshine of her eyes for himself, and for himself alone.

Donald Truesdale, who was the foreman of the Cheesebox Mine, and who received liberal pay from his employers, was the type of man she admired. Of these strangers from far lands, she knew nothing. But the mountaineers about her she had known from her youth; and, in her estimation, Donald Truesdale was a mountaineer in whom there was no guile. She told herself it would be a happy day when she became Donald's wife.

And these were the thoughts that were in the mind of Nellie Tempest, as she walked, that morning, toward the spring beside the trail. She was not yet aware that the stranger had departed from the house, but supposed him to be lying asleep in the little upper room.

Still thinking of Donald, she picked a bunch of delicate flowers, and pinned it at her throat.

"Dear, dear Donald!" she mused. "How he loves me!"

Then she stopped aghast, a deep horror growing in her eyes.

She had turned a slight bend in the trail, and before her the spring was revealed; and beside it lay the form of a man. The deathly-pale face, streaked with blood, was turned toward her; and a glance showed her that it was the face of the stranger, Arthur Hepburn.

A low moan of fright came from her anguished lips.

For a moment she was rooted to the spot. Then the bucket slipped from her nerve-

less grasp, and she turned about and ran toward the cabin with the speed of a frightened deer.

"Oh, father! Oh, Uncle Isaac!" she panted, before she came in earshot of the house. "Oh, dear! He has been killed!"

Thus ejaculating, she reached the door, and stood, with heaving bosom and starting eyes, on the threshold.

"What is it?" said Job Tempest, who had walked yawningly into the room. "You look 'sif you'd seen a ghost!"

"Oh, father!" she exclaimed. "The stranger—Mr. Hepburn—is lying up at the spring—and—and—I think he's dead. He's been shot. There's blood on his face!"

"The deuce!" was Tempest's ejaculation. "I reckon you're mistaken. How kin that be? He ought to be up-stairs asleep, by rights!"

"Oh, it's true, father! It's true!" she cried. "Maybe he isn't dead. Maybe he's only hurt!"

As if to reassure himself, Tempest sprung up the ladder leading to the room above, knocked on the door, and then threw it open. He saw that the room was empty and the window hoisted.

"Beats my time!" he declared, climbing down again.

A sudden horror had frozen the girl.

The thought that Donald might have been the author of that bloody deed had forced itself upon her, when she recalled Donald's jealous looks of the previous evening.

"Donald would not have done that! He could not have done that!"

"You said he's layin' up at the spring?" Job inquired. "We'll go up and take a look. Maybe he ain't hurt much. Reckon his hoss is in the stable?"

He ran from the house to ascertain.

"Likely his hoss throwed him!" he asserted, on coming back. "The critter's gone, too. What in tarnation made him go 'way in the night?"

Nellie Tempest's mind was in such a whirl that she scarcely heard her father's words.

"Perhaps it was Uncle Isaac!" was her conjecture, when the old man shuffled, snarlingly, from the rock house. "Uncle Isaac attacked him twice. Surely it wasn't Donald!"

Job Tempest had started up the trail; and Nellie, drawn by a morbid and irresistible fascination, was hurrying after him. She dreaded the sight she so soon must see; but felt that it would be impossible to remain at the house with Uncle Isaac. She must know if the stranger were dead or only hurt.

Tempest walked at a rapid gait, and it required but a few minutes to bring him to the bend which revealed the spring.

Nellie crowded close behind him, looking past him toward the gruesome object she expected to see.

Tempest stopped short, with a snort of surprise, and turned sharply on Nellie.

"Hain't a durned thing therel!" he growled. "What kind of a song 've ye been singin' me? Hain't nothin', ner nobody, there!"

Nellie could not believe him; not even when she had hurried by him, and the spring and its surroundings were in full view and she saw no dead form lying there, could she credit the evidence of her senses.

Wrought to a high pitch of excitement, she bounded on; and, when near the spring, she beheld something glittering on the ground. It was a small object that proved to be a jeweled locket. It had probably been dropped from Hepburn's pocket, and, in the fall the lid had sprung open, revealing now to Nellie a fair young face.

It was really the face of Hepburn's mother—long dead.

She picked up the locket.

"It must be the picture of his sweetheart," she thought.

Then she held it up for Job's inspection.

Job was at her side, his keen eyes scrutinizing the "sign" about the spring.

He could not understand what he saw. There, in the wet earth, was the evidence that Nellie had spoken truly, but he could not see whether the young man had betaken himself. If Hepburn was as sorely hurt as Nellie had stated, he could not have dragged himself away; and, in any event, he

could hardly have dragged himself away without leaving evidence of the fact.

"It gits me!" he confessed, rubbing his eyes, to make sure that he saw aright. "The young feller—er somebody, was hyer, Nellie, just as you said: but he's gone. Which goes to show that he wasn't dead, at all, as you thought. Now, run back to the house, while I prospect around a bit."

Then his eyes lighted.

"Better gimme that!" and he extended his hand for the locket. "I'm goin' to look in to this thing, an' that may help me. The idee o' havin' a feller stop over night in your house, an' ride away before day, an' git shot or hurt in that way—an'—"

He floundered with his words, and again scanned the ground for something to help him.

Manifestly, he was seriously troubled. Whether for the reasons he assigned, or for other and more potent reasons, will be left for the future to disclose.

Nellie did not wish to turn back to the house, but she saw that her father was in no mood to be disobeyed; so, she reluctantly retraced her way, after delivering the locket into his hands.

As soon as she was out of sight, Tempest got down on his hands and knees and carefully scrutinized every mark and imprint about the spring, going over them carefully again and again, to make sure he was right in his conclusions.

When he felt there was no more to be learned there, he tried to puzzle out the trail he fancied he saw; and, following it, struck into the hills.

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTOPHER AND PARD.

"I THAY, Chritopher!"

The words were drawled by a dudish young fellow, who twiddled a cane and stared through an eye-glass at his companion.

"I thay, Chritopher, thith ith what I call tough, donchuknow! I do, for a fact. Here we are, in the wilderneth, no knowing how many mileth from a human being, and in danger from wolveth and other wild creatureth!"

"They wouldn't bother you, sonny!" and a smile crept into the eyes of the man addressed. "They would scorn to make a meal off o' sich as you. So you needn't worrit!"

The two were camped near a small fire, which showed evidence of having been recently built; and near the camp-fire two burros were nosing the scanty herbage.

They had manifestly passed the night there, but a couple of bundles of bedding, neatly corded for transportation, told that they did not mean to tarry.

The one addressed as Christopher was a man slightly beyond middle age, and remarkable for his stature. He was a head and shoulders taller than an ordinary man, and seemingly slender. But, this was only seeming, produced by his height. A heavy beard, and long hair falling to the shoulders, with clothing better adapted to the wilds, or a mining town, than to civilization, completes the description.

He had been stooping over the fire; and now, as he lifted himself and looked keenly at his dandified companion, his broad chest, sinewy limbs and muscular arms, were more fully revealed. That he was not merely a large man, but a man of giant strength, as well, could not be doubted by the beholder.

The dudish fellow was not a small man; and the only thing effeminate in his appearance was the dudish lisp, and the eccentricity of the cane and eye-glass. He was smoothly-shaven, dark-featured, and not uncomely; and his hair, parted in the middle, was almost as long as was that of his companion.

They were, however, a strangely-matched pair;—as strangely-matched as one would likely see in many a day's journey.

"Do you think tho?" the dude lisped, in answer to the giant's statement. "Do you really think tho, Chritopher?"

"They'd want somethin' with a little more sap in it. You're about as pithless as they git 'em up."

The dude stared, with comical seriousness.

"I thay, Chrithtopher," and he gave the eye-glass a twist. "What do you think of me get-up, anyhow? Do you think the girl will be able to recognithe me in thith-dith-guith?"

"Your own mother wouldn't know you," Christopher assured, with a broad grin. "Fer a green hand, I must say you do it very well. Very well, indeed!"

"And the scar don't thow, Chrithtopher?"

The dude lifted his hat, at the question, and revealed a reddish, ugly mark on the side of the head; which, however, was entirely concealed when the hat was in place, and was also concealed when the hair was brushed across it.

He drew the hair away, to more fully disclose the-scar.

"You'll have to be a little careful about that," said the man addressed as Christopher, looking grave. "And I'm afraid, sonny, you're a little bit reckless, too. There may be eyes in these hills, even though we don't see them. Bear that in mind, will you?"

The hair was deftly drawn across the scar, the hat replaced, and then the dude advanced to the fire, where he squatted at the tall man's side.

"You're right," he said, dropping the lisp and lowering his voice. "Keep me in mind of it, will you? I'm as forgetful as the deuce."

"Have your disguise on always, or we'll never succeed. We have keen men to deal with."

This was also said in low tones—tones so low that a man hidden behind the nearest tree could not have caught the words.

It is plain to the reader that the dude was not what he purported to be; and it may be equally plain that he was none other than Arthur Hepburn, who had been dropped from his saddle by a seemingly fatal shot near the spring on the Leadville trail, above Job Tempest's cabin.

Several weeks had elapsed since the events of that night; and the wound that had brought him so near to death's door had healed; though, as seen, the scar was still visible, when pains were not taken to conceal it.

He had lost flesh, too, which helped to change his appearance. He had been a blond, then, with light hair and blue eyes. The eyes were still blue, but the hair was much longer and almost black, and the complexion was very dark. The cane, the eye-glass, and the lisp, acted as still further disguises.

Altogether, his appearance was so altered that his most intimate acquaintance would hardly have recognized him.

How had he, apparently a dead man, vanished so mysteriously from the spring?

He had been found there by his friend, Christopher, or "Colorado Chris," who had come on him, lying there, at the very moment Nellie Tempest flew homeward with her startling story.

Colorado Chris saw that, though the young man was badly hurt, he was not dead; and, fearing the dastard who fired the shot might put in an early appearance, he had lifted Hepburn in his strong arms and borne him with haste into the shelter of the hills.

That was why Job Tempest, returning with Nellie to the spring, had not been able to find the young man she had reported to be lying there dead.

Nor did Job Tempest, though he made minute search of the surrounding country, and sought anxiously to follow the dim trail leading from the spring, come on the young man, or learn in any way what had become of him.

Colorado Chris had anticipated such a pursuit, and had concealed his trail with infinite pains. He felt it was not a time for combating enemies; and that his whole energy must be given to saving Arthur's life, if that life was to be saved.

His enormous strength enabled him to carry Hepburn without difficulty, and his long legs enabled him to cover the ground at a rapid pace, in spite of the roughness of the way.

He did not halt, until nearly a mile lay between him and the spring.

There, finding another spring, walled in by a thick growth of aspens and pines, he placed the injured youth on the ground and began restorative measures.

A hasty examination had already revealed to him the nature and extent of the injury.

The bullet had cut into the flesh, just above the forehead, and had plowed an ugly gully; but, apparently, it had not fractured the skull.

Carefully Colorado Chris washed away the matted blood, and then fitted a bandage.

He had forced a small quantity of brandy between the pallid lips, and repeated this from time to time; and chafed the hands and limbs and body until there was a sense of returning warmth.

"He will live!" was his muttered ejaculation, as he looked into the pale face and saw a spot of returning color. "I wonder who fired that shot? He has been incautious, and his enemies have winded him. I was afraid of something of the kind."

An hour thereafter, Arthur Hepburn was again conscious that he was among living men, though he was so weak he could scarcely lift his head from the moss that served as a pillow.

The next day, however, he was able to travel; and, by slow degrees, the two made their way from the dangerous vicinity to a point where Arthur could safely recuperate, and where plans could be made for future work.

Nor was Colorado Chris any more what he seemed, than was the dude who lisped and fiddled with the eye-glass.

Arthur Hepburn had met him in Denver, where the giant had opened an office as a special detective and had there employed Christopher Norton to assist him in the task he had in hand.

That task promised to be intricate and difficult. It promised, too, to be girded by peril.

It will be recollect that Arthur Hepburn was from the British metropolis.

He was the second son of Lord Wildmere; who had long been dead, or supposedly dead.

Lord Wildmere had vanished from his native land, with his infant daughter;—had gone to America; and the report had come back to England that both had been slain or lost, while traveling in the Rocky Mountain wilderness.

The older brother, Albert Hepburn, thereupon assumed the title and the estate, which he still held.

Recently, however, certain facts had come to the knowledge of Arthur, which led him to believe that the death of his father and sister had been brought about, in a cold-blooded way, by this elder brother, Albert; and that Albert had caused the double murder to be committed that he might the earlier gain the title and the great wealth of his father.

Just what that information was, will be inquired into by and by. Suffice it now to say that the John Munden, whom Arthur so indiscreetly inquired for, was supposed to be the agent employed by Albert Hepburn in his murderous task.

And, having said this much in explanation, we will return to the dude and the detective, camped on the mountain trail.

"Keep your disguise on, always! *Always*, do you understand? Why, boy, even I may not be what I seem. There's no telling. Never judge a man by his clothes; and, as often as not, it's not safe to judge him at all till you know him thoroughly."

Arthur Hepburn stared. This was a new idea: that his assistant, Colorado Chris, could be other than he appeared!

"I'll be careful, hereafter!" he promised, when he had completed his stare.

"Who am I to trust, Christopher?"

He was sober and thoughtful.

"No one! Play your part as a dude. I'm with you; and was joking, just now. Play your part, and we'll pull through! You're the dude; always the dude; remember that!"

Colorado Chris got up from the fire, and went out to where the burros were cropping the grass.

"We want to be on the road, in a few minutes, sonny!" he called back. "Better git a move on you! Leadville's only a few miles ahead, and the sooner we drive into it the quicker!"

"Correct, Chrithtopher!" and the dude detective twirled the cane. "Leadville ith the town for me!"

CHAPTER VII.

NELLIE TEMPEST'S DISTRESS.

CRUCHING in a hollow near the rock house, Nellie Tempest stole covert glances at her father, who was stooping above the earth, a few paces away.

There was semi-darkness about her, lighted only by the brilliant moon;—and the movements of Job Tempest were calculated to arouse suspicion.

She had heard him muttering strangely; had seen him leave the house stealthily; and had followed, impelled by an intense curiosity.

"He's hiding something there!" she whispered, creeping still closer to the point her father occupied. "Surely, he's hiding something! What can it be?"

There was the suggestion of tears in her eyes.

The tears had not been caused, however, by what she now saw; but by the treatment accorded to Uncle Isaac, that afternoon.

Job Tempest had been in an ill-humor, all day; and, as was usual with him, he had vented his spite on the unfortunate and helpless old man.

His treatment of Uncle Isaac had not been short of inhuman, and Uncle Isaac's screams still rung in Nellie's ears; and she could, now and then, still hear the old man's groans, as he nursed his bruises in the shelter of the dark rock house.

"God will punish father, for the way he treats Uncle Isaac!" Nellie inwardly commented.

Then, she crept still nearer, for she fancied she caught the jingle of coins and the rustle of crisp bank-notes.

She was doing a perilous thing, as she well knew. She was assured that, if caught thus spying, Job Tempest's wrath would descend on her own head, as it had done on the head of the unhappy old man.

Nevertheless, she crept stealthily onward, impelled by that irresistible curiosity.

A number of weeks had elapsed since the visit of the strange young Englishman and the supposed murder at the spring. But not a day had passed in which she had not thought of him.

She had known, too, that Job Tempest had been made very uneasy by the mysterious disappearance of the body.

Job had spent much time, in that interval, in walking through the hills, presumably searching for what he could not find.

Nellie had not questioned him, but she intuitively divined something of the thoughts that stirred in his breast.

He had not returned the locket to her, and she had feared to ask for it; but the fair face pictured therein had haunted her waking and sleeping hours.

She was growing to suspect Job Tempest—and to feel that he was not the upright man her fancy had painted him.

And now, as she crawled quietly in the direction of the jingling coins—she was sure it was coin—her suspicions increased.

She could hear Job muttering indistinctly, and saw that he was preparing to conceal something in the earth.

He had scooped a hole in the stony hollow. In one hand he held a box, into which he was looking, and the other hand was thrust into a buckskin pouch.

She saw him draw out some coins and bills and thrust them into the box.

After he had emptied the contents of the pouch into the box, he securely locked the latter and deposited it in the hole.

"I'll keep that for a nest-egg!" she heard him mutter. "It may come powerful handy, one of these days."

Then, with hands and feet, he pushed the earth in on top of the box, tramped it down solidly, and slid a heavy stone over the spot.

To further conceal all indications, he tossed away the extra earth, scattered leaves and pine-needles liberally about, and endeavored to give the place its original look.

Nellie saw that, if she wished to escape discovery, she must not linger there longer, and so stole, with the same cautiousness, back to the cabin.

When she entered the room, her eyes fell on a letter that had dropped to the floor.

She had not noticed it there before; and, feeling that it might be of importance, she

picked it up, and hastily scanned it by the light of the dim lamp.

What she saw caused her face to pale, and she tucked the paper into her bosom, as she heard Job's steps on the turf without.

Tempest came in, making some remark about the weather, and saying he hoped it would be fair to morrow, for he wanted to go to Leadville.

He did not note the fevered look that rested on the face of his daughter.

He seemed, in fact, preoccupied; and, after sitting for a time, looking vacantly out into the dark forest of pines, he announced his intention of going to bed.

Nellie was glad to escape his scrutiny. She knew her cheeks were on fire and that there was an unnatural glitter in her eyes, which she feared her father would surely detect.

She did not reply to his announcement, but moved about, as if busying herself with household tasks.

When Job had retired, and she felt safe to do so, she drew near the lowly-turned lamp, drew the letter from its place of concealment, and eagerly read it over.

And this is what she read:

"Here is your money. I am not sure I ought to send it, or that you have earned it; for, on your own statement, there is no absolute certainty about the matter. He disappeared, strangely, you say; then, how can you surely know that the deed is done? However, we'll hope that the work was thorough."

There was neither name, date, nor signature, but the envelope bore the postmark of "LONDON, ENG.", with the date, "May 29, '79." And it had been addressed to the initials, "P. Q. X., Leadville, Colorado, U. S. A."

It was a very mysterious letter, and very enigmatically worded; but Nellie Tempest fancied she comprehended its meaning quite as clearly as if it had been couched in plainer terms.

She believed that the mysterious "P. Q. X." of Leadville, was none other than her father, and that the letter referred to the death of Arthur Hepburn, the young Englishman. And she believed, further, that she had, that very night, witnessed her father bury the money mentioned therein—the blood-money received for his foul crime!

The thought made her giddy and sick at heart, and she tried to put it from her; tried to tell herself that it was a lie; tried to make herself believe that her father could not be guilty of such a thing.

But, her inmost feeling refused to second this laudable effort.

"Oh, what shall I do?" was her heartfelt cry.

And from the gloom of the mountains there came no answer.

CHAPTER VIII.

JACK TRAVERS COMES TO GRIEF.

"WHOOP! Hold me, somebody. Hold me, er I'll bu'st!"

A ragged, trampish fellow, who had just issued from a bar-room, and whose general appearance indicated a too close acquaintance with the flowing bowl, flapped his arms up and down like the wings of a rooster, and then clasped his sides in a very ecstasy of mirth.

"Hooroar! Hooroar. See the game cock a-comin'! Watch me clip his wings. Cock a-doodle doo-oo!"

He swung his arms again and gave a rude imitation of a cock crowing.

The cause of Jolly Jack's merriment was the appearance of the dude mounted on the burro!

Leadville was then but a mere collection of log houses and rough shanties, and its main street was filled with the stumps of recently-removed trees.

Amid these stumps the dude was carefully guiding a burro, the operation seeming to require his utmost attention.

In the dude's eye sat the eyeglass, while one hand was given to the cane and the other to the reins.

It was a rather remarkable sight for a rude mining-town—more remarkable than anything ever seen by the average Lead-

ville denizen, and it is little wonder, therefore, that Jolly Jack Travers (for by that name the hills tramp was known) should contort himself in that way.

Behind the dude, glancing from side to side as he rode up the street, was Colorado Chris, whose appearance was quite as remarkable, if in a different way.

Christopher's burro was a diminutive beast; and the giant's legs, which almost dragged the ground, came in frequent contact with the stumps.

Mounted thus on the burro, Colorado Chris resembled very much one of those small boys who ride sticks for horses, and propel themselves with their own legs. It hardly seemed that the burro was bearing him up.

Jolly Jack's loud exclamations drew a curious crowd from the saloon, and many wondering remarks from this curious crowd.

"You've been sp'ilin' to eat up somethin'! Now, there's yer meat! A reg'lar dandy, a-sailin' into Leadville, in that kind o' style! It jist lays over anything!"

The words were addressed to Jack, who swelled pompously, and beat his breast like a gorilla.

"Wough! wough! He won't make two bites for Jolly Jack. Watch me polish him off! Dandies hain't no business hyer, now-how!"

Again he beat his breast and gave forth that ludicrous roar.

He had already fixed the attention of the dude and of Colorado Chris.

The latter smiled faintly at the spectacle made by the ragamuffin, and the dude endeavored to fix Jack with a stare through his monocle.

Arthur Hepburn had never before encountered a member of the genus typified by Jolly Jack Travers—the mining town bummer and dead-beat. But he seemed not at all afraid of the howling creature who brandished his arms and yelled so ferociously.

He did not draw rein as Jack seemed to expect, nor in any way seek to avoid an encounter.

The burro lifted its heavy head, gazed at the swinging arms and red face, and uttered its disapproval in a deafening bray.

"It's a challenge, Jack Travers!" one of the men laughingly declared. "Jackass against jackass! Go in and win; I'm backin' ye."

"What ith that creature?" the dude asked, turning questioningly to Colorado Chris. "Can't be one of thothe mountain lions; you've been tellin' me of?"

The remark was made in a tone sufficiently loud to be heard by those in front of the saloon, and was greeted with a yell of delight.

"Whooee! A mountain lion! That's a new name for Jolly Jack! You've been tellin' us you was a grizzly bear, Jacky; but you never said that you was a lion!"

"I'll chaw him up fer that!" was Travers's angry retort.

"What ith that creature? You haven't told me, yet."

Again the dude twisted his head toward the giant and pointed his cane in the direction of Jolly Jack.

"It's a What-is-it! Better let it alone, sonny. It's got fangs in its mouth and a sting in its tail. I've met them kind o' critters before."

The strange couple were now almost in front of the saloon.

A cheering yell arose, which was entirely too much for tramp Jack's equanimity.

He howled ferociously to scare the dude; beat fiercely on his breast, and then sprung forward.

Instead of directing his attack to the rider, he turned toward the little beast, and grasping the burro by the tail, attempted to hurl the animal sidewise upon its feet.

His object was to unseat the dude and throw him sprawling into the dirt of the street.

But, the effort failed. The burro was a stubborn beast and resisted energetically—adding to this by lunging out with its heels, in a manner to thoroughly frustrate and disconcert its assailant.

"I'll have to tap you on the head with thith sthick!" the dude declared.

The crowd whooped.

"I'm bettin' on the best man," came in a chorus. "Go in, Travers! Go in, sonny! Go in, mule!"

Tramp Jack was frenzied by this temporary defeat.

"What's yer name?" he screamed, shaking his fist in the dude's face. "I'm Jolly Jack Travers, of Grizzly Bear; a' if you'll jes' come down off'n that burr I'll pull the hide off'n ye."

He was within reaching distance; but he did not deign to strike; contenting himself with leaping back and forth and shaking his fist defiantly.

"I'm Jolly Jack, of the Wolverine Hills! Climb down off'n that hoss! What's your handle?"

"Me?" and the dude drew himself icily erect. "I'm Theptimuth Thample, thir, at your thervice. "I believe you were making thome remarkth to me, were you not?"

Again the saloon loungers roared.

"Five to one on the dandy! I kin jist see that he's a fighter from 'way back. Why don't you pull his nose, Jacky? Put a chip on his shoulder and knock it off!"

Colorado Chris was apparently taking no interest in the singular contest, other than to view it with a faint smile. He evidently thought the dude abundantly able to take care of himself.

Jolly Jack made a pass at Septimus Sample as those scornful words came from the latter's lips. The dude parried the blow with the cane, then slipped to the ground.

"You were thpeaking to me, were you not?" and he gave Jack a frigid stare. "Theretha my card. If you really want to fight me, we'll have it arranged in a gentlemanly manner, with thecondths and all that. I'm not a sthreet bully, if you are."

He daintily plucked a card from his pocket, and extended it with a flourish.

It bore the name of "Septimus Sample, New York."

"I hope to be in your beathly town for a few dayth, and will meet you at any time and plath that may be fixed."

This was so direct an insult, or it was so considered by Jolly Jack, that it drove him frantic; and he made a lunge, with the intention of plucking away the eye-glass.

"You will have it, eh?"

These were the words of the dude, as he reached out a muscular hand and grasped Jack Travers by the ragged collar. "You're not willing to fight like a gentleman?"

Jack writhed in an endeavor to shake off the grasp; but the dude's muscles were like iron.

"You will have it, eh?" repeating the question.

Then the saloon loungers stared, for they saw Jack Travers lifted bodily in the air, as if he were no more than a child.

"You will have it, eh?" and this time the inquiry was pitched in a still higher key.

"Ow! Ow!" yelled Jolly Jack, as he felt himself spinning round like a mad pin-wheel.

Following this, was a crash: a blinding spray of flying water; and Jack Travers, a sadder and wiser "bum," picked himself from the muddy stream into which he had been bodily hurled.

"My good fellow, if you want any more, there's plenty to be had in this thyop!" was the dude's declaration.

But the bummer had had enough, and took advantage of the shelter of the nearest building, around which he dived, disappearing at full speed.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIFYING TRANSFORMATION.

THE chances were great that Jolly Jack Travers would never again seek to molest the dude, and that he would be careful whom he approached in future. Such men learn slowly, however.

The dude, when he had received the congratulations of the miners and loafers about the saloon, whose respect for him was greatly increased, remounted the burro; and, with Colorado Chris, continued on up-town, until a boarding-house was reached.

It scarcely deserved the name, for it was only a rough shelter, into which men crowded to escape the biting night-winds.

It had a wing of logs, though; which, for

a money consideration, Colorado Chris secured for a lodging room.

"We can't afford to camp with the general herd, ye see!" he explained to Sample, as they inspected the room, after the bargain had been consummated.

Sample, or Arthur Hepburn, to give him his true name, was wildly anxious—and had been since nearing Leadville—to visit Job Tempest's cabin.

He wanted to see the girl again, and to ascertain if his disguise was capable of withstanding close inspection.

Therefore, at the coming of night, he set off down the trail leading to Tempest's, having been fully warned by his detective friend of the perils he might encounter and of the care he should exercise.

There was another and stronger reason which drew the young man toward Tempest's. More than once, during his convalescence, the thought had come to him, and been as often put aside, that the lunatic, Uncle Isaac, might be none other than his own father, and Nellie Tempest his own sister!

The thing seemed so wildly preposterous, however, that he had refused to harbor it. He had fancied his father and sister long since dead. That was the account given him years before, and which he had always believed. He was not yet ready to revise that early-formed opinion.

If Job Tempest, though, was really John Munden, there seemed a possibility that this wild idea might be true. Lord Wildmere and the girl might not have been slain at all, as had been reported.

He shuddered a little, as he passed the spring which had come so near witnessing his death. The rivulet bubbled placidly, and the wind sung in the pines, as on that other night, when he had first seen it.

He did not tarry at the spring, but hurried on down the trail, a creepy sensation about the roots of his hair. That spot would always be a place of terror to him. And was he not going toward the man who had fired the murderous shot?

He turned the bend, and saw a light gleaming from the cabin window. He also heard sounds that were not pleasing. Uncle Isaac was crying out, as if in pain.

Hepburn quickened his steps. Colorado Chris's warning was still in his ears, however, and he was careful to maintain the part he was playing. No matter what came, he must be a dude, Septimus Sample! That was one thing he must not forget, as he valued his life!

Though the eyeglass was stuck in place, he swung the cane with a little more energy than his dudish proclivities would seem to warrant; and in a short time was near the rock house.

All the while, the cries and moans of Uncle Isaac reached him like stabbing knives. Could it be that Uncle Isaac was his own father?

He turned the angle of the rock house; and the moonlight revealed a scene that drove the blood in hot tides through his veins.

Job Tempest was cudgeling the old man most unmercifully, beating him about the head and shoulders with a small stick.

"I'll learn ye to pry into my business!" Tempest was howling. "I'll learn ye to peek and spy about. This is your home, not the cabin, and you'll stay in it, er I'll break every bone in yer body."

He brought the stick down with another whack, and Uncle Isaac howled again.

Then, catching sight of the advancing form of the young man, Uncle Isaac stretched forth his hands, appealingly.

"Oh, save me! Save me!" was his plea. "He's killin' me!"

The appeal was not needed.

Arthur Hepburn had already lost his caution. He only saw before him a helpless old man, who sorely needed a protector.

However, in time, he recalled the warning of Colorado Chris.

"Thand back there, you theoundrel," he cried. "If you lay hand on that old man again, you'll pay for it."

He spoke the lisp with difficulty, owing to his excitement.

With kindling rage, Job Tempest wheeled quickly about and faced the new-comer, giving no more heed to Uncle Isaac. The

stick was still in his hand, and he uplifted it.

"Who are you," he growled, "that comes interferin' with my business?"

The effeminate-looking dude did not impress him greatly, though, had it been lighter, the hot fire in the steely eyes of the young man might have served as a warning.

The dude held the cane easily in his right hand, as Job thus stared at him.

"Young man, I'll learn you some sense!" and with this Tempest further uplifted his stick, and brought it down with cruel force.

But it was swept aside by the cane; and, when Tempest dashed forward like an enraged steer, he felt a heavy fist smash against his forehead, which sent him reeling backward.

The blow enraged him beyond endurance, and drove from him every thought of caution.

Uncle Isaac had fled to the shelter of the rock house.

Nellie Tempest was nowhere to be seen.

Job leaped to his feet, with a deep curse, and reached for the long knife that swung in a sheath at his belt.

Before he could get it, the battering fist, falling like a pile-priver, sent him again reeling.

"I'll kill ye!" Job gritted. "I'll kill ye fer that!" and again he strove to get at the knife.

He succeeded this time; and, when he again got on his feet, he brandished the knife furiously.

But, he had learned something; and, instead of making one of those wild dashes, he began to circle about Septimus, seeking a weak point by which he might leap in.

The dude faced him, with the uplifted cane, watching him warily.

The moans of Uncle Isaac came from the cavern-like hole.

With a cry that resembled the snarl of a wild beast, Tempest finally launched himself, endeavoring to break through the dude's guard.

He partially succeeded, but Sample avoided the murderous stroke of the knife, and again did the battering fist get in its work.

The blood was trickling from a cut in Job's temple, and, streaming into his eyes, gave him a horrible appearance.

"I'll kill ye fer that!" he howled again.

And once more he commenced to circle, watching narrowly for an opening.

Septimus Sample saw that he was to have a fight of huge proportions on his hands. Tempest was in so savage a mood that nothing but blood would satisfy him.

The cane was but a poor weapon. But it was more than a cane; for, on realizing the serious character of the work that lay before him, the dude plucked the case of the cane away, and a shining sword was revealed in his hands! The cane was really a deadly weapon—was, in fact, a sword-cane.

The production of the sword appeared to put Job Tempest in a still more savage mood, if that were possible; and it increased his caution, too. He did not endeavor to lunge in, but continued that circling movement, like an eagle hovering about its quarry and afraid to attack.

The slender, shining blade, held in the right hand of the dude, swung around like an impassable barrier, glittering coldly in the moonlight.

A moan from the rock house momentarily drew Sample's attention.

It was taken advantage of by Tempest, who leaped in, striking savagely with the knife.

But the knife-blade was turned aside by the sword, and then, with a deft twist, the knife was flirted from Tempest's hand and thrown spinning into the bushes.

The momentary inattention had been but a pretense to draw Tempest within reach of the sword, that he might thereby be disarmed.

Tempest realized this, when it was too late; but he had a bull-headed sort of courage that served him well in emergencies.

He dashed through the guard with reckless impetuosity, and, before the dude could meet the onset, Tempest had clasped him about the waist in a bearlike hug, thus rendering the sword almost useless.

Septimus Sample felt himself lifted bodily,

and then the two rolled together, crashingly, on the rocky slope.

Tempest was a better rough-and-tumble fighter, probably, than was the dude, and he reached out his right hand, clasped the dude's hair, and tried to work his thumb into one of the dude's eyes.

It was an unfair advantage, frequently resorted to, and one which speedily brings victory; for the torture of the thumb in the eye cannot be long endured. Eyes have even been ruined, or torn out, in that manner.

But an unlooked-for circumstance thwarted Job Tempest's intention. The mass of black hair came away in his hands; and, as he had thrown his whole strength into the effort, the relaxing grip placed him momentarily at a disadvantage.

As has been seen, the pretended dude was a man possessed of great strength; and he now twisted, like an eel, from beneath Tempest's body, and hurled Tempest backward. Then he leaped to regain the sword.

Tempest was on his feet, at almost the same instant.

The dude's hat and mass of black hair were gone; likewise the disguising eye-glass; and he stood before Job Tempest fully revealed in his true character.

Tempest stared at him, with starting eyes. He could not doubt that he saw before him Arthur Hepburn—the man who had been shot and killed at the spring, and who had so strangely vanished!

There were few more superstitious men than Job Tempest!"

His jaw fell and his strength forsook him. He had always believed that the dead might return to re-inhabit this world; and here was ocular evidence.

To his fancy, Arthur Hepburn was not a creature of flesh and blood.

No; Hepburn was but the embodied spirit of the murdered man, returned to haunt and trouble the scene of his murder.

Tempest's legs became so weak they could barely sustain him.

And, when he had looked again and could no longer doubt what he saw, he turned about and fled, with a scared yell, from the vicinity.

CHAPTER X.

THE MIRTH OF UNCLE ISAAC.

SEPTIMUS SAMPLE was heartily glad to be rid of Job Tempest's unpleasant attentions. How the fight might have terminated he could not conjecture; but Tempest had given such a taste of his prowess as would lead to caution on the dude's part, in the future.

He picked up the wicked-looking knife, scanned it critically, and threw it down.

Uncle Isaac had poked his head out of the rock house, and was giving the dude a questioning look.

A low chuckle came from the old man, which recalled the dude to the fact that his disguises were gone.

The moonlight plainly revealed him; and there came the terrifying reflection that Nellie Tempest might be near; and, at that time, he did not desire her to recognize him.

Those insane chuckles from Uncle Isaac were irritating him beyond measure; and Sample felt humiliated, as well as angry when he had to re-assume the disguises in the old man's presence.

Uncle Isaac's chuckles swelled into a roll of cackling laughter.

"I know you!" he declared.

Then he danced out of the rock house and tantalizingly pointed a finger at the dude.

"I know who you are! You can't fool me! You've got a scar on your head. Ha, ha! they thought you were killed, but you weren't! Tempest sees ghosts sometimes, and he seen one to-night. Ha, ha!"

Then, the mirthful laughter broke, peal on peal; and Uncle Isaac bowed himself, with shaking sides.

"It's as good as a play! First, you're one man, and then you're another; and I'm the robber in the cave!—no, I'm the robber's prisoner in the cave, and you've come to rescue me! It's just like a play, isn't it?"

"What do you know of plays?" the dude asked, advancing and speaking earnestly.

"Did you ever see a play, Uncle Isaac?"

He had replaced the sword in its case; and now twirled the seeming cane with dudish care.

He burned for information concerning the old man; and like a cry welled the question he had so often asked himself:

"Can Uncle Isaac be my father?"

"Ay, that I have!" Uncle Isaac replied, sobering a little.

"What is your name? Would you be willing to tell me your name?"

"You know! You know!"

Uncle Isaac retreated, and once more pointed that scornful finger.

"You know what my name is well enough!"

"Tell me again; I've forgotten it, if I ever knew."

"Ho! Ho! Such a question. Why, to be sure, it's Uncle Isaac!"

"But you have another name," the dude persisted. "The name you used to bear. You weren't always called Uncle Isaac!"

The old man sadly shook his head.

"I don't know!" he said. "I don't know!"

Then he began to cackle again, pointing to the eye-glass and the cane; and Sample found it impossible to bring him back to the subject.

The thought had come to Septimus that Job Tempest might get over his scare in a little while, and endeavor to get a crack at him with a rifle, from a safe distance; and this was beginning to trouble him, when he was attracted by a light step; and, turning, saw Nellie Tempest hurrying down the trail.

She had apparently been to the town; which Sample thought a strange thing—for there were perils to be encountered by a woman on that lonely trail.

Nellie Tempest stopped short, when she saw that a stranger was standing in the yard—if the little plot of ground about Job Tempest's cabin may be given that designation.

The dude detective twirled his cane and lifted his hat, taking extreme care not to reveal the scar.

"I came down thith way, mith, only a few momenth ago; and, finding a man beating thith harmleth old creature, I interfered; and we had thomething of a fight. But the rathcal bath gone, now! Took to hith heelth and dithappeared in the woodth!"

He made the declaration, as if he fancied he had done something to win her gratitude.

Nellie Tempest paled. She knew well enough that the encounter had been with her father.

"Ho! Ho!" Uncle Isaac giggled, pointing his fingers at the pretended dude. "Look at him, Nellie! Look at him! He's a regular devil! Ho! Ho! Ha, ha, ha!"

His cackling laughter echoed weirdly.

Nellie's pale face became scarlet. She thought Uncle Isaac was making fun of the dude's appearance.

"You must not do that!" she protested.

Then she took a quick step forward, and spoke in a low tone:

"I think the man you fought, and who was beating Uncle Isaac, was my father! He'll be back in a little while; and oh, sir! he has a terrible temper! I beg of you not to stay here! Go at once! I'm afraid, when father comes again, he will do something dreadful!"

"It couldn't have been *your* father?" the dude urged.

"Yes, it was! Yes, it was!" Uncle Isaac howled. "And he'll kill you, when he comes back. But he won't come back, for he thinks you're a ghost! Ha, ha, ha!"

He crossed his fingers, peered through them, and winked knowingly.

"Ha, ha, ha! Job Tempest thought he saw a ghost!"

Nellie Tempest was flushing, and looking bewilderedly from the dude to the old man; and an uncomfortable sensation hovered about the roots of Sample's hair. He expected the old man to state who he believed the dude to be, next.

"If the thituation ith tho perilouth ath that, I thuppothe I'd better be going!" he lisped. "But, aw, really! I hate to tear myselfh away, donchuknow! I do, for a fact!"

"Hear him! Hear him!" and the old man tittered. "'He hates to tear himself away, donchuknow!' It's as good as a play!"

"Uncle Isaac!" came the girl's voice, reprovingly. "Is that the way to treat a gentleman?"

"A gentleman! Ha, ha, ha! I tell you he's a devll! A devil!"

"Please go away!" the girl implored, not relishing the strange glances Sample was bestowing on her.

He was wondering if she could be his sister.

"My name ith Thample," he returned, bowing almost to the ground. "Theptimuth Thample, at your thervice!"

Again he searched her face.

"I'm very happy to have made your acquaintance; and, if you intith on my going, I will go. But remember the name, pleathe. Here ith my card!"

He drew a card from a pocket and slipped it into her hand.

He then turned to go; but was interrupted by a footprint.

Turning about, he saw Donald Truesdale come from the rear of the cabin.

Donald gave him a suspicious glance; and Uncle Isaac began once more to cackle and to look through his crossed fingers.

Sample feared that his disguise would be penetrated, or his real character revealed by the chattering old man.

So, without giving heed to Donald, whose looks were not reassuring, he tipped his hat to the girl, and strode into the trail leading toward the town.

And after him floated the words of Uncle Isaac:

"He's a devil! He's a devil! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE LAIR OF THE LEADVILLE LIONS.

In a cavernous space, beneath a shambling building, out on the hills above Leadville, a number of men were congregated.

Leadville's big mines are out on those hills, now; mines that push their shafts into the earth for a thousand feet.

There were only stumps there, at the time of which this is written; stumps and trees, and two or three rough, but large, buildings, like the one described.

Night was over the mountains; though a faint glow came to show where burned the lamps of the streets, saloons and business houses, and where the roysterers and loiterers congregated.

Three hours had passed since the sun had touched the heights of Mount Massive, that stands, shouldering its fellows, and apparently guarding the town.

The men within the room beneath the big building were quite as strange in appearance as their surroundings. There were eight of them, grouped about a few tables, on which lights faintly shone.

And all or them wore masks, in shape like a lion's head.

The reader, peering into this hole, is really looking into the lair of the secret organization known as the "Leadville Lions."

Who and what they were will be made speedily apparent.

One of the men, with a lion's head for a mask, rose from his seat, and, going to a throne-like dais, at one end of the dim room, whereon stood a chair and a stand, rapped for order.

The lion head masks were drawn closer, when this order was heard; and the seven men remaining at the tables faced their chairs forward.

"Peril has been reported," said the chairman; "and we are now ready to hear a more formal statement concerning it. The Lions should exercise care in the hearing and earnestness in the heeding; and, when the time comes to strike, should such a time come, let them strike as becomes their names! We will hope, though, that the alarm may be false."

Apparently, each knew his neighbor, and no flummery of passwords and grips was needed.

These Lions formed a dull body of beasts, however; for there was a man in that underground chamber of whom they had no knowledge. A man, who lifted his head with exceeding stealth, and peered at them out of eyelids that beadily twinkled.

This man had dropped down in a corner,

and had drawn a blanket and some old moth-eaten skins about him; and lay there, in seeming constant danger of discovery.

He had feigned intoxication (or had it really been intoxication?) on entering; and he may have relied on this as a protection.

He had stumbled into the cavernous place quite by chance, apparently, two hours before; and before the coming of any of the Lions. He had reeled and lurched; had grumbled monotonously and rubbed his dirty hands; and, on tumbling down into the corner, had dragged the blanket and the skins about him, as by an instinct to shield himself from the cold.

This man was Jolly Jack Travers, the blow-hard and bummer of the "Wolverine Hills;" Jolly Jack Travers, who had been so easily discomfited by the lisping dude.

But if Travers had been intoxicated on coming into the underground apartment, he had recovered from this intoxication in a great measure. At least, the beholder would judge so, on seeing the snappy fire in his eyes and the alertness of the erected head.

The chairman's face was turned in the direction of the corner where Jack lay; but the shadows were dense, in that corner, and the chairman saw nothing.

A search of the room had not been thought necessary; for the Lions had recently shifted their meeting-place, and it was not deemed possible that the location of the new one could have become known.

One by one they had slunk to this retreat; and had sat about the tables talking, with the lamps turned low, for a long time before the chairman cared to formally call the meeting to order.

After a number of unimportant remarks from various members, a man arose to whom Jack gave closest attention. The lion's head hid this man's face; but the form and the voice were those of Job Tempest.

Several nights had passed since Job's inglorious combat with the dude; and in the interval Tempest had come to learn several things.

He knew, now, that he had not had a fight with a spirit; but with a real man, who was none other than Arthur Hepburn.

He had learned, too, that Arthur Hepburn was in Leadville with a strong ally; and that this ally was the detective known as Colorado Chris.

By piecing together bits of evidence, and making a careful study of the situation and all the circumstances, he had arrived at the conclusion that their coming to the great mining-camp boded him ill. That, in fact, they were there for the purpose of striking him a deadly blow.

He had dimly divined this long before; but it was, now, a certainty!

"Brothers of the desert," he began, with a premonitory clearing of the throat. "It was my report which the King referred to awhile ago; and you will find it a true report. You all know that I hain't a man to give false alarms, ner to git skeered easy!"

"Therefore, I hope you will listen close to what I've got to say!"

There was certainly one man in the room who was listening closely enough to have satisfied the most exacting. Job did not know of the presence of this individual, however; and he went on:

"Brother Lions, they's been two men come into these hills, lately; and they've come hyer on a lion-huntin' trip. I think both of 'em are detectives. One of 'em is. I know! He's the big, tall chap, that calls hisself Colorado Chris; and t'other is the feller who's been playin' the part of a dude!"

There was some whispering comments, and heads were drawn closer together.

"You ought to know what the meanin' of their comin' is, as well as me. It's been whispered into my ears that they're in the employ of the Wells-Fargo Company."

Job Tempest knew that, in making this statement, he was striking home.

One of the men in the room was in the employ of the Express company. He was considered by the Lions one of the most valuable members. This nefarious band, calling itself the Leadville Lions, was an ambitious organization. Many of its members were rich and powerful. Two or three of them were considered leading citizens. They owned mines and shares in reduction works.

One of their favorite tricks had been to ship gold and silver bullion by the Wells Fargo, hold up the Express and rob it of their own goods, and lay claim against the company for damages.

They had not halted at this, however; but had entered extensively into the road-agent line; taking, at the muzzle of the revolver, rich shipments made by other mine-owners.

The fact that one of their number was an employee of the company, who was trusted by his superiors, aided them mightily in this work. He kept them informed of the dates of shipments, and furnished other facts to guide them to success.

These were the truths relied on by Job Tempest, when he made his statements.

He was a shrewd fellow, was Job Tempest, and his desire was to make the Leadville Lions believe that Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample were after *them*; whereas, he knew that these men were after *him*!

He did not feel able to cope with the detectives, single-handed; feared the disaster and ruin that seemed to stare him in the face; and was making a bold effort for help, in the combat he knew was coming. He felt that he must have this help.

He continued his remarks, in this strain, repeating and emphasizing them, until he felt he had firmly fixed the thing in the minds of his hearers.

"Our brother has spoken well," the captain of the band asserted, rising to his feet, when Job had subsided. "This is a peril we dare not ignore!"

Hope bubbled up in Tempest's breast. He knew he had won; and that, henceforth, the terrible force of the Leadville Lions would be directed to the crushing of the men he so feared.

"It would be unwise to ignore it," the captain continued, "and our brother has the thanks of the band for making the danger known! When we know our foes, we know where to strike."

The eyes were shining from the dark corner, and the uplifted head was thrust forth, while the keen ears of the hidden man were drinking in every word.

Other members of the band spoke, all in the same strain; bringing still further joy to the bosom of Job Tempest.

But no definite plans of action were decided on, that night. It was too serious a matter to be entered on hurriedly, even though the peril seemed so imminent; and another meeting was appointed for further reports, when final action should be taken.

There were other matters to engross the attention of the Leadville Lions, that night; but not of a character to interest the readers of this narrative; and the hour was extremely late, when the Lions emerged from their lair and crept away toward the lights of the town.

And after them, as stealthy as the stealthiest, crept the man who had been hidden in the dark corner; and whom the reader has seen to be Jack Travers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE THREE DETECTIVES IN CONFERENCE.

THE time was verging on morning, when Jack Travers, whose action had been of so strange a character, stole up to the door of the room occupied by Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample.

No rays from any lamp fell in that quarter, and the darkness that reigned was of a pitchy kind. Nevertheless, Travers seemed to survey every inch of the way and to literally feel the path before him, as he proceeded; and it was not until he became absolutely certain that he was in the vicinity that he walked up to the door.

He then gave a rap that was as peculiar in its sound, and in every way as singular, as had been his actions. It was low and rolling, like the subdued "rat-fat-tat" of a woodpecker hammering against a hollow tree.

There was instantly a stir in the room; and a moment later the head of Colorado Chris was thrust through the doorway.

A few whispered words passed; and then Jolly Jack glided, shadow-like, into the room, and the door closed after him.

Septimus Sample was seated at the table;

the room was but dimly lighted by a small coal oil lamp; and the appearance of both Septimus and Colorado Chris indicated that they had been expecting this visit.

All the blinds of the room were closely drawn, so that no one without could have seen into the apartment.

"What success?" Colorado Chris asked, pushing a chair to the table for his visitor, and drawing up one for himself.

The entire appearance of Jack Travers had undergone a change. It is true that his hands were still grimy and that his face had the reddish look of dissipation which characterized it; but these indications were belied by his ease of movement and the alertness of his glance.

"I put my head into the lion's mouth and got it out without a scratch," he answered, sinking into the chair. "It was a risky performance, but it paid, pards; paid big."

All of which, makes it evident that Jack Travers was not a stranger to the two men quartered in that room; and should make it equally clear that his attack on the dude, when that individual first appeared in Leadville was but a farce, played for effect.

In truth, Colorado Chris, in speaking of the three, (Septimus Sample, Jack Travers and himself,) spoke of them as the Trio of Rocky Mountain Detectives.

And they were pards, in the truest sense; pards, bound together by a common purpose and seeking a common end.

That purpose and end was the discovery of the man who—so Arthur Hepburn had been led to believe—had murdered Lord Wildmere and daughter.

Hurriedly Jack Travers ran over the points of his night's discovery.

Jack had come to Leadville, in advance of Colorado Chris and Sample, for the purpose of ingratiating himself in the good opinion of some of the men they expected to shadow; and it must be said, to his credit, that he had done his work well. There was no man in Leadville who would have been so little suspected by Job Tempest and by Job Tempest's friends, as the pretended bummer Jack Travers.

Hence, he was likely to prove invaluable in serving Colorado Chris.

"It gives the thing a serious look!" Chris confessed, when he had heard Travers's story. "We'll have the whole Lion outfit to fight, now, instead of one. But it shows that we're not far out of the track, while we're hounding *him*. In my opinion, pards, that man, Job Tempest, is no one else but the John Munden, we're after."

"And would not that last go to show, then, that the supposition that Uncle Isaac and Nellie are my father and sister, is correct?" Sample earnestly questioned.

They had already discussed this point; had run over the evidence for and against the theory; but had not been able to arrive at a definite conclusion.

"It's a strong indication. There could hardly be a stronger. But—"

"But, what?"

"We haven't a scintilla of proof that your father and sister are alive. That's the one weak point in the thing. You didn't even think of such a probability, when you first came here."

"That is true," the pretended dude admitted. "But the thing has been impressed so strongly on me, since, that I can't get it out of my mind. I really believe, and I believe more so every day, that that old man, whom they call Uncle Isaac, is my own father, the rightful Lord Wildmere; and that the girl, Nellie Tempest, is my sister!"

Colorado Chris looked at Travers.

"Pards, I hold to the same opinion!" Travers declared, speaking cautiously.

None of them had spoken in a tone much above a whisper.

"As you know," Travers went on, "I have boxed about this camp a good deal, and I've kep' my eyes and ears wide open. I've been watching this Job Tempest like a hawk watches a chicken. It was by watchin' him that I found where the lions held their meetin's. I've seen Nellie Tempest, and I've seen the old man—beg pardon the old gentleman!—a dozen times er more; and I've had in mind the suspicions of our young friend, all the while. And I'm ready to say that I believe he's hittin' the nail right square on the head!"

It was a long speech; but long speeches and wordiness came easy to Jack Travers—as witness his bombastic talk on first meeting the dude in the Leadville street.

Colorado Chris knew there was not a keener observer in the West than Jack Travers. Jack was a detective, with years of experience behind him. He was, too, a man who would well weigh an opinion like this before expressing it.

There was nothing preposterous in the assumption that the insane man, called Uncle Isaac, was the missing Lord Wildmere, or that Nellie Tempest was his daughter.

Taking that view of the case, the two had not been killed by John Munden, in the wilds of the mountains, but had been held by him, probably for the reason that he had feared to murder them. Likely, the old man's insanity had been produced by Munden's cruelty, and Nellie had been permitted to grow up in ignorance of her true parentage.

It was a plausible theory, and had much to sustain it. To Arthur Hepburn it was convincing—as convincing as anything of the kind could possibly have been. The proof was circumstantial, it is true; but circumstantial evidence, it is said, is often the strongest and most conclusive.

"In that event," and Colorado Chris thoughtfully stroked his long beard, "we ought to move promptly. If the old gentleman *is* Lord Wildmere, it is a shame to leave him for a single instant in the power of the man calling himself Job Tempest. It's a crime, almost, against both the old gentleman and the girl!"

A pleased look came into young Hepburn's eyes.

"I hoped you would see it in that light!" he admitted. "Travers agrees with me fully; and now comes the question of what to do? I can't endure that Uncle Isaac—I shall call him that till I know beyond a doubt that he *is* my father—shall be further maltreated by that man!"

His expression was pained, as well as earnest.

Colorado Chris stared thoughtfully at the floor.

"Probably it will be just as well to strike now as later," was his conclusion. "If we are to have the Leadville Lions arrayed against us, the sooner we get through with this thing the better! I fancy they'll prove dangerous antagonists."

"Now, I have a plan!"

Both Travers and Arthur eyed him earnestly, impatiently awaiting his disclosure.

"The only way to find out if Job Tempest is John Munden," and he still further lowered his voice, "is to force *him* to tell! No one in these hills would possess that knowledge, aside from him. We must force a confession from him. And the way to do that is to play the boldest scheme we know how!"

Again he halted, looked thoughtfully at the floor, and stroked his long beard.

"I think we'd better go straight to his cabin; catch him napping; put the muzzle of a pistol against his head; tell him that we know he is John Munden, of England, and scare from him the truth. That will wind the whole thing up in a hurry, or, at any rate, it will show if we are really on the right trail. If we're not on the right trail, we want to know it!"

"There's chunks of solid wisdom in that!" Travers commented, sagely nodding his head.

Arthur Hepburn's eyes showed that his perplexity was vanishing. The plan promised to sweep away the mystery at a stroke; and, therefore, was very acceptable.

"I'm with you in that!" he said.

"And I!" Travers echoed.

"Very well, then; it's the plan we'll adopt!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLAN BAFFLED.

THE suggestion of a belated snow-storm was winging its way over the mountains. The wind moaned dismally, and piped whistlingly amid the rocks. A powdery spray of snow came, now and then, rustling against the pines and chafing the trees. Occasionally the clouds cleared away and the moon

came out. Then the darkness would thicken again, the heavens would threaten, and the dashing sprays of snow-dust would hurl itself over and through the forest.

The night wind was chill, as it always is in those high latitudes; but it was uncommonly chill, just now; and the three men, crouching in the shadow of the trees, drew their coats closer about them, and shivered.

These three men were Colorado Chris, Jack Travers and Septimus Sample. It was a terrible night for so dudish a creature as Septimus seemed to be.

They were on the slope of the hill, above Job Tempest's cabin; and were peering toward the cabin, in the hope of catching the gleam of a lamp.

"There is too much scud flying," was Colorado Chris's declaration. "We'll have to get nearer, before we can see anything."

The dude detective thought of Uncle Isaac in the rock house, and drew his coat still closer.

"It's a bad night for Uncle Isaac," was his reflection. "How he lives in that hole is beyond me."

His heart ached, the more, because of the thought that, possibly, Uncle Isaac was his own father; and, likewise, that it was through the machination of his own brother, Albert, that his father had been brought to that condition.

"Albert must be possessed of the heart of a fiend! How could he—how could he have acted in that manner! Crowns and kingdoms would not have tempted *me* to such a crime."

But Albert Hepburn was quite a different man from his brother, Arthur. He was coldly cruel, harsh and insolent to inferiors, filled with a haughty pride, and absolutely heartless where his interests were concerned.

Arthur had felt this heartlessness on more than one occasion.

Dimly these thoughts—which were more feelings than thoughts—burned in Arthur Hepburn's mind, as he stood, that chilly night, beneath the swaying pines.

It was the night succeeding the one in which Jack Travers had watched the proceedings of the Leadville Lions.

The work the trio intended to perform had been carefully planned. Travers had scouted around the cabin, during the day, to make sure that Tempest was at home.

It had been thought best to approach the cabin at night, and at a comparatively late hour, for then there would be less likelihood that Job Tempest would have help within call.

"If we find that Donald Truesdale is there, we'll have to wait until he goes home," Colorado Chris whispered; and again he moved forward, followed by Travers and the young man.

They did not anticipate any trouble from Uncle Isaac; not much, if any, resistance from the girl.

They were already beyond the spring; and, as they moved further toward the cabin, the absence of the light they expected puzzled them.

"Probably they have gone to bed, or have put up a storm blind," was Colorado Chris's comment.

No sound, however, came, even when they stood in front of the rock house.

Colorado Chris pushed aside the clumsy door of the rude structure and essayed to penetrate the gloom. He expected to hear Uncle Isaac's heavy breathing, if nothing more.

"The old man ain't here!" he whispered back. "He must be prowling about somewhere. Rather a disagreeable night for that, I should say!"

Then the three moved on toward the cabin.

While they stood in waiting, Travers circled the cabin, looking narrowly for the old man.

The silence was oppressive. The place seemed really deserted. The snow scud chafed drearily against the wall, and the winds muttered, spirit-like, amid the projecting pole rafters.

Travers came back, saying he could discover nothing of the old man.

Colorado Chris advanced, and rapped on the door.

He half-expected a shot, in reply; and drew aside to avoid it.

But there came no sound, in answer.

It began to seem that the place was deserted, and a strange fear gathered about the heart of each.

Again he rapped; this time with the butt of his revolver.

Still there was silence.

He tried the door, and found it locked.

"What shall we do?" he whispered; and his tones evinced anxiety.

"I'm 'feared the birds has skipped!" Jack commented.

Colorado Chris applied the revolver a second time, giving a series of thundering knocks.

Jack, with his fears fully aroused, scuttled to the rock house; walked into it; and kicked about, to assure himself that it was empty.

He was back shortly, with the information that Uncle Isaac was certainly nowhere about the place.

"I'm going into the cabin!" Colorado Chris asserted. "Perhaps Tempest is lying low. He may have got wind of this visit; and is prepared to open fire, when the door opens; but, anyway, I'm going in."

Finding that the lock would not yield, he thrust his heavy shoulder against the door, and literally pushed it inward; falling, sprawling on the floor, as the door-hinges parted.

But the anticipated shot did not come.

In making this forced entrance, he was aware that it was little short of burglarious in its character, but he fancied that the interests at stake warranted it.

Travers and Sample, stood, weapons in hand, ready to assist, should there come need.

Colorado Chris picked himself hastily from the floor; drew a match from a pocket, and scratched it on the wall.

The light showed the room to be deserted.

"They have gone!" he said, in a baffled tone.

There seemed no need of further secrecy or care; and the others advanced into the room.

More matches were struck and the cabin thoroughly explored. There was every evidence of a hasty flitting. A number of things had been taken; such as could be easily conveyed. The heavier articles, however, and the furniture remained.

Colorado Chris looked into the faces of his friends, by the light of a flaring match.

"They've got ahead of us!"

Then the match went out.

No words were needed to tell that, in some manner, Job Tempest had been made aware of their intentions.

A chill of fear came with this knowledge.

If Job had learned that, he might have learned much more. It proved that the spies of the Leadville Lions were already about them; that their every movement was watched; and that their peril was constant and imminent. It was an unpleasant discovery.

"Pards, we've got a big job on our hands," said Travers, in a hushed voice, as he stepped outside. "Them Leadville Lions is the strongest power in these hills."

Such a declaration from Travers meant much; and the feeling that their task was not to be easy grew on them.

In the shadow of the rock house they held a conference.

It was impossible to obliterate the traces of their visit. The shattered door would tell its own story. However, that seemed to matter little, if Job Tempest was already in possession of the facts surmised.

"I'm going into that den of lions tonight!" said Colorado Chris, speaking calmly and quietly.

"And I'm going to trail Job Tempest!" Travers asserted. "That outfit didn't fly away from hyer. They left some kind of a track in goin'; an' I'll see if I can't foller it, as soon as light comes!"

Thus it was arranged; and under the shadows of the trees they parted:—Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample returning to the town, and Travers remaining near the cabin to begin the work at the earliest possible moment.

CHAPTER XIV.

TEMPEST SECURES AN ALLY.

COLORADO CHRIS and his friends were not wrong in thinking that Job Tempest had obtained knowledge of their intentions. It was not definite knowledge; but it was of a character to frighten him, and cause him to seek safety in removal.

Although Travers was circumspect in his movements, while shadowing Tempest's cabin, the fact that such shadowing was going on was not lost on Tempest, who was as wary an old fox as is ever met.

He had observed Travers; but—and in this there was safety for Jack—Tempest had not recognized him.

But he had leaped to the conclusion, without further evidence, that a plot was hatching to do him harm.

Such men take fright easily; and Tempest proceeded, without more ado, to place space as a safeguard between himself and his enemies.

Becoming aware that some one was spying on the house from the shelter of the pines, and sure that some one was in the pay of Colorado Chris, he returned to the cabin, and gave himself to reflection.

Looking up, he saw Donald Truesdale advancing.

Donald came often to the cabin—drawn by the pretty face and bright eyes of the young woman who had so recently promised to become his wife.

A pleased look came into Tempest's face. Here was a man who could be relied on in any emergency, as he knew; if only he could be attached to the Tempest interest.

He wondered if Donald had seen the skulking form in the pines; and decided to make no mention of the circumstance, if Donald showed ignorance on the subject.

At the first opportunity, after Donald's coming, Job drew him aside.

"I've been wantin' to have a talk wi' ye," he professed, "an' I thought mebbe you could gimme the time, now!"

"Certainly! Certainly!" Donald assented, only too glad to please the father of the woman he loved.

Job hesitated and shifted uneasily on his feet.

"I don't know jist how to say what I want to say!"

He looked questioningly at the young mine foreman, and his face proved that he spoke truly.

"You can trust me," said Donald, hoping to relieve Job of unnecessary embarrassment. "I am to be your son-in-law, one of these days, you know—or, at least, that is my hope—and you have my consent to say what you've got to say, freely; and, if it's something to be held as a secret, you've my promise to keep it so."

"Thankee," said Job, beaming amiably, and hitching on his feet again.

"I hope, that, after the tellin', you won't think any the less of yer future daddy, though!"

He gave Donald a glance out of the corners of his eyes.

"It's jist this away," and he plunged his hands deep into his trowsers pockets, and assumed a courage he did not feel. "It's jist this away:

"There's a couple o' fellers come into this country, lately; an' they come hyer to do me up. You've seen 'em, an' know who they air!"

"Who?"

"The big, tall feller, that calls hisself Colorado Chris, and the t'other one that plays the game of dandy."

"I know them," and Donald compressed his lips. "So, you don't think them the true blue?"

"I might, if I hadn't had my eyes opened. The dandy come a-peokin' down hyer, one night; an' me an' him got into a squabble—for I didn't like him to be prowlin' about my cabin that way, don't you see!"

"Certainly not!"

"We got into a squabble; and, whilst it was a-goin' on, his hair came off, his one-bar'led spec fell out of his eye; and then, gittin' his mad up, he whipped the cover off'n that make-believe cane—which the same is a sword—and lunged with it at me!"

Donald's eyes opened in surprise.

"We had it hot and heavy, fer a time; an'

he got so cussid mad that he spit out jist who he was an' what he come hyar fer. So, ye see, I know what I'm talkin' 'bout, when I say that they're playin' a game."

Donald was very much surprised, and also very much interested. He had not liked the appearance of the dude, from the first; but had never thought that the fellow was not really what he seemed.

"An' now comes the part that I hate so awfully to tell!"

"Spit it out!" Donald urged.

"Them two men air nothin' more ner less than detectives, an' they're hyer a-trailin' me!"

"You hain't done anything to give 'em cause?"

"But I have, though!" Job whined. "That's the wu'st of it! I've yer promise to hold it quiet, if I tell it?"

Donald looked very grave, but nodded an affirmative.

"I got into a business tangle, back East, some years ago, and had to skip out. You see, in tryin' to save what little money I'd got together, I put my name to a bit o' paper that I hadn't ought to!"

Job Tempest didn't utter the word "forgery," but Donald Truesdale knew just what he meant.

"I've told the whole thing to the girl," said Tempest, with a humiliated air, "an' she's ready to talk to ye about it. If you kin help me, Donald, I'll be obligeed; and, if not, I trust that you'll do me no harm."

Donald inwardly despised Job Tempest, for the spirit he was exhibiting; but he managed to conceal this.

"I'll go in and talk with Nellie," was his reply. "You've told her everything, you say?"

"I hated to," said Job, "but I thought it best!"

With an uneasy feeling, Donald turned from him and entered the cabin. Nellie came out of the other room to meet him. There were traces of tears in her eyes.

"Oh Donald!" and her voice trembled.

She could not say more; and Donald put his strong arms about her, as if to shield her.

"Job has been talking to me," he said; "and I guess I know what you're thinkin' about. Whatever he has done, though, can't cast any shadow on you. You're not responsible for his deeds."

"But you could never marry a felon's daughter, Donald! You could never marry the daughter of a man who had been sent to the Penitentiary!"

"He hasn't been sent, yet!" and Donald's lips closed firmly.

A swift resolve was forming in his mind.

However, he put the suggestion from him, and began to talk.

"No matter who you were I would marry you, and think myself fortunate in getting you for a wife!"

He kissed her cold cheek.

"I could not let you, Donald. I could not let you so disgrace yourself! For I love you too well, Donald!"

Job Tempest had understood his daughter's character, when he decided on this plan to obtain Truesdale's assistance. She was a girl of intense pride, in certain directions; albeit, it was a false pride. She detested the crime, but clung faithfully to the criminal. She would marry Donald, if the imputation of that crime could be kept from Job Tempest's reputation; not otherwise!

Job had fostered these ideas with great care, and now they were deeply rooted.

"I will do what I can to aid your father, if that is what you wish," Donald promised. "I will stand by him—for the love I bear you! Do you know anything of the men who are here to bring about his arrest?"

"Nothing!" and her cheeks burned.

"It may be a mistake—this idea of his. They may be here on an entirely different mission. That—that forgery was committed long ago!"

"I said that to father. I suppose he told you, though, as he told me, what the young man admitted? The—the young man who is pretending to be a dandy, and with whom he had a fight!"

Donald had not forgotten it.

"Yes," he confessed, "that ought to be proof."

He was wondering how Sample could have so far forgotten all caution.

She looked at him, appealingly.

"He must not be arrested," he declared, speaking of Tempest. "Has he plans to avoid it?"

Then she told him, so far as she knew, what her father's plans were, for avoiding arrest.

The subject was thoroughly discussed; and then Job, appearing at the door, was invited in to participate in the talk.

With the earliest coming of night, as a result of this conference, Donald Truesdale appeared at Tempest's cabin, with pack-mules; and a night flitting followed.

Job Tempest had decided to baffle the bloodhounds of the law by shifting his abiding-place.

There was much grumbling on the part of Uncle Isaac, when he was forced to quit the rock house that had been so long his home; but his objections were ignored; and the cabin by the mountain-trail became the deserted thing which Colorado Chris and his friends found it when they came there, some hours afterward.

Job Tempest had succeeded in defeating their purpose. And he had gained an ally, in Donald Truesdale, whose worth was not to be overestimated.

CHAPTER XV.

JACK TRAVERS GETS A FALL.

JACK TRAVERS, in his attempt to follow the trail of Job Tempest's party, had one of the keenest men in the mountains to contend against, in the person of Donald Truesdale.

Truesdale was an adept in mountain craft. He had lived in the mountains since his boyhood. He had fought road-agents and Indians, had trailed horse-thieves and cattle-thieves, and had learned the thousand and one things in mountain life which are gained only by experience.

Hence, when he deliberately set to work to hide the trail of the retreating party, he performed the task with exceeding skill; and Jack Travers, keen as he was in such matters, found himself completely at fault, before he had gone a dozen rods from the cabin.

Travers, with a boldness that was akin to recklessness, had camped down in the cabin for the remainder of the night and given himself up to slumber. Few men would have cared to do that; but Jolly Jack was reasonably certain Tempest would not return.

With the coming of dawn, he began to study the indications around the cabin and the rock house.

He saw where two pack-mules had been fitted with burdens; and he saw, also, the tracks made by three men and one woman.

He could not fancy who the third man could be; and his natural supposition was that one of the Lions had given Tempest assistance.

For a dozen rods he encountered little trouble. The trail was reasonably plain. Then it vanished on a rocky ledge, which the wind had swept bare of snow; and his toil commenced.

The ledge led to the top of a rounded ridge that reached for miles, and was as bare as a billiard cue. Not a particle of snow had lodged on it; and of earth there was none.

A half day was consumed by Jack on this ridge; then he found some faint marks, which he believed indicated the point where the party had descended into the valley.

Further on he found the trail; and, getting his bearings from that, made better progress.

The sun was still an hour high, when he halted in a canyon, under the shadow of old Mount Massive. A feeling of victory was in his heart.

Crouching in a clump of aspens, he had seen a man slip into this canyon, whom he believed to be Job Tempest.

He did not dare venture further, until the coming of night.

The snow was now gone, for the day had been warm.

Jack was as hungry as a wolf; for he had consumed the small quantity of food he had found at the cabin, and which he had brought with him.

The whine of a dog ascended from the

canyon's depths; which was followed by a yelp, telling Jack that the dog had been kicked.

It was very puzzling, the presence of the dog there. Job Tempest did not own a dog.

When it grew sufficiently dark, Travers crept to the mouth of the canyon and looked in. Nothing rewarded him, however, until he had proceeded over a hundred yards.

Then a cone of light, seeming to fall from a niche at the canyon's side, came to welcome him.

He drew back hastily; for the feeling was strong at first, that the light had revealed him. It made a broad track, which would serve well to protect the people hidden back of it. The approach through the canyon would be difficult, because of this illuminated roadway.

Jack Travers breathed freer, when a second's time showed him his presence was still undetected.

He wondered what kind of a hole Tempest had crawled into? The canyon looked out on Leadville; but was so distant and in a section so little visited that it afforded much security. Still, there would remain the ever-present danger of discovery by prospectors!

With alert, keen eyes, Travers searched the canyon's depths, seeking a way in that would not bring too great peril.

He could not be sure, because of the dog, that the people he trailed were really Job Tempest's party. He must make certain of that before returning to Leadville with his report.

Believing he might creep nearer, by hugging the canyon's left wall, he again advanced; getting down on all-fours, and finally on his stomach, and hitching slowly forward.

He had not gone this way a half-dozen yards, when there came an unexpected and terrifying interruption.

From some unseen covert the dog rushed out, with savage growls, and pounced upon the man creeping so snakily over the rocks.

Jack had not time to turn aside, or prepare for defense, until the dog had its teeth fastened in his coat.

The creature was an English bull-dog, with a brutish, savage head, and cruel fangs.

"Cuss ye, take that!"

The words were gritted, as a keen knife, in Travers's hand, was plunged to the heart of the dog; which fell back almost instantly, dead.

There was a stir behind the light, a door seemed to open, and forms of men were seen to appear.

Travers tried to leap up and fly. But he found he could not! The teeth of the dog had pierced through the coat, and had become fixed there. Even in death, the fierce creature had not relaxed its hold.

The patter of feet warned him of his peril. He saw that he could not escape. He plucked at the knife, thinking to cut the coat with it.

He would not have been given time, however, to do this, and then get out of the canyon.

Whereupon, he lifted his voice in a series of howls.

"Help! Help!" he bellowed. "I've stabbed the varmint, but he's a-killin' me, anyhow! Oh, help, quick, er I'm a goner! Please help! Ow-ow-oo!"

Such a wail, once heard, would have been attributed to none other than the bummer, recently so well-known a character in Leadville.

Seeing he must encounter these men, Jack had fallen back on his old ruse.

"Ow! Ow!" he continued to howl. "Help! Help!"

The patterning footsteps were near.

Then was heard the voice of Job Tempest.

"What's the trouble? What're you doin' hyer?"

"Oh, I do b'lieve I'm killed!" Travers moaned. "A mountain lion jumped on me, an' I stabbed him; but he's eternally ripped my back open! I'm a dead man, gentlemen; I'm a dead man!"

Truesdale leaned over and tried to lift Jack to his feet.

"Oh, I'm killed!" was Jack's exclamation.

"The lion's a-top o' me, yit! Pull 'im off!"

"Cuss it, it's the dog!" Tempest declared, in a puzzled voice. "Ding it! You've gone and killed my dog! I hope he's ripped you

clean in two. What you doin' in hyer, any-way, Jack Travers?"

He bawled for a light; and Nellie Tempest hurried toward them, bearing in her hand a lighted lamp.

Truesdale tried to pull the dog away, and to learn how seriously Travers was wounded. He could not release the teeth from the coat, however, until he had cut out a piece of the cloth with his pocketknife.

By this time the light of the lamp revealed the scene; and Job Tempest stood, paling and fearful. Travers's knife was in the heart of the dog; and Travers was covered with blood, though, when a hasty examination was made, he was shown not to be hurt.

"What's the meanin' of this?" Job demanded, with fierce energy.

Travers was looking at Truesdale. He had not thought of Truesdale as the third man of the party.

"A dog?" and he glanced incredulously down. "May I be chawed up, if I didn't think I'd been jumped on by a mountain lion! Gentlemen, if you hadn't come to my help, I'd 'a' been a dead man! You have my thanks!"

A tear glistened in his eye;—and, strange as it may seem, that eye had taken on a watery, rummy look.

"You're drunk!" Truesdale said, in a tone of disgust.

"You've killed my dog; an' you hain't said what you're doin' hyer!" asserted Tempest.

"Gentlemen, if you'll tell me where I am, I'll be obligeed to you!" evading the question. "I'm mortally blessed if I know! I walked into this thing awhile ago, thinkin' it a street, an' that that light yonder was one of the street lamps! If I am wrong, I hope you'll set me right!"

There was in his words, and in the ideas they expressed, every proof of intoxication.

"If you'll show me my boardin'-house, I'll go there; an' I won't bother you, no more!"

He tried to clasp Truesdale around the neck, in a drunken embrace, but Truesdale avoided him.

Nellie was regarding the dog sorrowfully; and, for Travers, her thoughts were those of disgust.

"If you'll only tell me!" Travers pleaded. "Gentlemen, I'll pay fer the dog! I'll git you another'n, jist like that 'un! You couldn't expect me to tell what it was that reared on me that way; and so I say, the killin' of the critter was an accident; but I'll pay fer him!"

Such a promise, from Jolly Jack, was worthless. He couldn't have paid for a drink, at the cheapest bar in town.

"Travers, I believe you're a-lyin'!" was Tempest's stern declaration. "You're playin' in a deep game, but it won't work! Come into the house!"

With this, he grasped Jack by the arm and pulled him up the canyon.

CHAPTER XVI.

A DESPERATE VENTURE

AGAIN let us retrospect.

When Colorado Chris, on parting, with Sample, from Jack Travers, stated that he meant to venture into the den of the Leadville Lions, that night, he was not sure, of course, that such a thing would be possible, or that the Lions would hold a meeting, that night.

However, on reaching the town, he proceeded, in company with Sample, to the shambling building which Travers had pointed out.

If they could do no more, they might be able to inspect it, and learn much that would be of future service.

"I hope none of those Lions are roaring around to-night, seeking us to devour."

There was a nervousness in the comment, telling that Colorado Chris was not pleased with the way matters were progressing. The mysterious flitting of Job Tempest, and things it suggested, troubled him.

Colorado Chris had hardly given utterance to the remark, when he felt a tug at his sleeve.

Glancing quickly around, he saw that

Sample had sunk softly to the earth; and he lost no time in imitating this example.

Sample's forefinger pointed through the gloom.

Three men were sneaking up to the door of the big building.

"Do you see that, Christopher?" speaking with the dudish lisp. "The lions are crawling to their lair."

"So it seems!" and Colorado Chris hugged the earth still closer, and tried to learn who the men were, or if their faces were at all familiar.

The gloom was too great, for this. But they had the satisfaction of ascertaining that the men disappeared at the house, and, presumably, entered the apartment which Jack had described.

"It's a detachment of the Lions, I haven't a doubt!" with a nervous thrill. "Now, if we were only in the house!"

They crawled still nearer, and lay there for some time, questioning the best course to pursue.

Then they crept to the door—the door above ground—and which was the only one visible, from that point.

The other door, leading to the underground chamber into which Jack had passed, was, apparently, no door at all, but a minning shaft.

Presumably, this shaft penetrated deep into the bowels of the earth. It had done so, at one time, when there was an attempt to work the mine; but that work had been abandoned, the building left to fall into decay, and the shaft to fill with *debris* and bits of broken timbers.

It really led but a short distance below the surface; to a point where a false door, set in the wall, seemed a part of the shaft.

And it was by way of this well-like place that the Lions dropped to the room where they held their secret conclaves.

All this had been made known to Chris and Tempest by Travers; and now the two drew near the shaft, hoping to find some safe way of getting into the room, where the Lions were probably holding a meeting.

"You watch outside a minute," the detective whispered, to his young friend. "Don't let any one come near, without warning me; and I'll see if there's a way to get in."

Thereupon, he dropped into the shaft, with remarkable boldness, and put an ear to the secret door.

He heard two men conversing in low tones, just beyond this door, but could not tell what they were saying.

"Hist!" came Sample's warning whisper.

Like a flash, almost, Colorado Chris swung himself out of the perilous place; and the two, retiring a short distance, and lying flat on the earth, saw another member of the band pass between themselves and the horizon line.

Both breathed heavily, and again Sample clutched his comrade's arm.

The man they saw was Job Tempest.

"He must have moved into Leadville!" Colorado Chris whispered.

What Job Tempest had done, was to leave Truesdale and Nellie, while they were not more than half-way to the canyon, and walk into town. He wanted to confer with certain men; and he wanted to take to the canyon the dog already described.

"I must learn what he's got to say!"

This was much easier said than done, though, as Colorado Chris was to ascertain.

Job Tempest disappeared down the shaft; and when it seemed that no other members of the band were coming, the pards crawled back to the point they had so hastily vacated.

Colorado Chris dropped into the hole and hearkened at the door, while Sample stood as a sentry above.

Again the voices beyond the door were heard by the detective, but he could not hear them with sufficient distinctness. A meeting—probably an important meeting—was in progress.

But, possessing no knowledge of the secret raps and passwords, and with the door thus guarded he could do nothing but crouch there in the darkness.

He had not anticipated this. There had been no grips nor passwords, Jack had said; and so he had thought to secure an easy

entrance. Doubtless the Lions had become scared, and had set safeguards against intrusion.

If Colorado Chris could have followed Job Tempest into the room, he could have seen a greater number of men in there than had met on the previous occasion.

Tempest's revelations had aroused them; and the meeting of this night had almost wholly to do with the presence of the supposed detectives in Leadville.

Job's coming was pleasurable received; and he was plied with questions.

He could tell them no more, however, than the information already imparted; with one exception. He thought it wise and discreet to inform them of the night's flitting.

"They've got me spotted," he said, in extenuation, "and I knowed, for that reason, that they'd put their paws on me first thing; and so I moved, for a few days. But I'll be back in the shanty, in a week! An' I say that, because I don't think the Leadville Lions, now that they know who these fellers really is, will let 'em live out the half of their time!"

This was truly Job Tempest's hope. He desired to so rouse the Lions to the dangers menacing them, as he claimed, that they would make short work of the detectives he so feared.

Then he spoke of Truesdale, and of the aid that individual had rendered him.

Truesdale was foreman of one of the mines owned by a member of the organization; though of this fact Truesdale had no knowledge—being ignorant of even the existence of such an organization.

"Bully for Truesdale!" and his employer looked pleased. "There isn't a better man in the country. I'm glad he's disposed to aid us."

"Of course, I had to tell him a bit of a fib," Job explained. "I couldn't 'a' got his help, otherwise! But you'll find Donald Truesdale on the right side, whenever the time comes that we need him. I've got the cinch on Donald! He's crazy to marry that there girl of mine, an' will do what's ever I ask him—to keep his future father-in-law in a good humor, you know."

The explanation was greeted with much laughing comment. Donald's infatuation had not gone unobserved.

"Hold 'im tight," was the advice. "He'll be more obedient an' reliable, now, than when he reely gits to be your son-in-law."

Colorado Chris, unable to hear anything of the words being said, drew back and re-mounted to the surface.

"I'd give a good deal to know what is going on in there! But it can't be done. And, now, I've thought of something! Why can't we work this thing that failed awhile ago? We went out to Tempest's to capture him. He'd gone away, and we failed; and, now, he comes here; walking, as you might say, right into our clutches! Isn't it our opportunity?"

Sample had been so engrossed with thoughts of the meeting that he had momentarily forgotten what they had meant to accomplish in visiting the cabin.

They had drawn away from the shaft, as Colorado Chris talked.

"I'm not sure but it's the very thing! Travers may not be able to find out anything; and we can scare this fellow, perhaps, into telling what he knows."

Thoughts of Nellie and of Uncle Isaac were again strong on him.

"We can make him tell us where he has taken Uncle Isaac and Nellie, and we can make him say whether or not he is John Munden. That is, if we can catch him alone."

That was indeed the problem.

If Tempest came out in company with the other members of the band, they could not hope to accomplish anything. And the probabilities seemed to indicate that as his most likely course. However, he had come to the meeting alone, and he might go away alone.

There were two paths he would likely pursue in leaving the place; one going straight toward town, and the other pointing in the direction from which he had come.

The detectives discussed the situation for a few minutes; and then Colorado Chris con-

cealed himself near the route Tempest had followed when coming in, and Sample crouched by the path leading to town. Colorado Chris took the first, thinking the chances greater that Tempest would go that way.

They remained there nearly an hour.

Then, they saw a head appear above the hole which indicated the mouth of the shaft. This head was followed by a second; and two of the Lions emerged.

Neither of them was Tempest; and they turned toward Leadville, passing within a few feet of the concealed dude.

He overheard their talk, but there was nothing in it to give information.

Another form then appeared, which Colorado Chris was sure was Job Tempest.

Five minutes had elapsed since the other men had passed out.

Feeling certain Tempest would turn in his direction, Colorado Chris gathered his energies for the anticipated struggle; and his inward prayer was that there might be no interruption, until they had Tempest safely in their power.

He was startled, therefore, when he saw Tempest turn toward Leadville and strike into the trail leading by Sample's place of concealment. He feared Sample would not be able to cope successfully with the old mountaineer. A dread of failure for his plan swept over him.

Then he saw Sample leap upward, and with a bound attack Tempest.

The sounds of the struggle were painfully apparent.

Colorado Chris dashed in that direction without delay, wild with the fear that the noise would attract the attention of the men in the room under the building.

He realized fully that if Tempest was to be taken, the work must be done quickly.

At that moment Tempest's voice was lifted in a call for help.

The apparently effeminate dude was giving him a hot tussle.

In another second Colorado Chris was at Sample's side; and he, also, hurled himself on the mountaineer with fierce energy.

Under their combined strength Tempest went down, struggling, and bawling out angrily for assistance.

"Help, help!" he roared. "Cuss ye, take that!"

He lunged out savagely with one heavy boot; and this, catching Sample in the stomach, sent him rolling on the grass, doubled in the agony of a deathly pain.

But Colorado Chris hung to the fear-stricken and howling rascal; and, had he been given time, would have conquered and subdued him.

He was not given time. Those cries reached the Lions in their lair, and brought them pell-mell to the surface.

A half-dozen of them swarmed from the shaft at the same instant.

Sample had got on his feet, and was approaching, to render his pard assistance.

"Slide," Colorado Chris whispered. "The game's up! Don't let 'em get their fingers on ye!"

He took his own advice, released Tempest, and bounded into the gloom.

Tempest bawled again, crying out for his comrades to hurry.

"There they go!" he shrieked.

Sample was flying through the darkness, at the heels of Colorado Chris.

"There they go!" Tempest yelled again.

A revolver shone in his hands now, and its biting report stabbed the air.

Other revolvers joined in, and a shower of whistling balls flew after the vanishing forms.

Colorado Chris slowed his pace.

"Are you hurt?" he whispered.

"Not at all," came the gratifying reply.

"Then come on! Make your legs spin. If those fellows, or any of their friends, get hold of us, we'll find it a bad night's work!"

Both realized the great peril of their situation.

They were wise enough, too, not to run directly into Leadville. On the contrary, after speeding along, in that style for a few hundred yards, they swerved sharply; and came into town from an entirely different direction.

But they had not seen the last of the Leadville Lions, as they were to discover, all too soon.

CHAPTER XVII.

HEMMED IN BY FOES.

COLORADO CHRIS and Septimus Sample succeeded in gaining the security of their room, without having been seen, as they believed, by any one on the streets. This was very gratifying; and, if they could have been sure that Job Tempest had recognized neither of them, they would have felt comparatively safe.

They began to feel safe, anyway, when the minutes sped, without bringing their foes.

The dawn broke rosily, for the night had been well spent when they approached the old building on the hill; and still their foes came not.

"I guess we're all right!" and Colorado Chris gratifiedly rubbed his hands together. "We played a great game, and it failed. Let us hope there'll be no forfeit!"

The tones were earnest, and even grave.

All through the morning hours, they remained close in their rooms; and, when it began to seem that the danger had entirely passed, they ventured into the town.

There was nothing to indicate that any man in Leadville knew aught of the exciting occurrences of the night.

Yet, now and then, there was a covert glance given, which told its own story. They had been recognized; and their peril would be much increased thereafter. The Leadville Lions were aroused; and they would be forced to exercise caution, if they did not desire to feel the teeth of those beasts.

They kept together, most of the time, to be prepared for an emergency.

Narrowly they watched for Job Tempest, but he was not to be seen. Travers did not put in an appearance, which served to increase their feeling of nervous uneasiness.

And so the day passed and the night came again.

"Apparently we're all right; but I can't feel that we really are!"

Chris voiced the sentiments of both. What they had seen had not been of an open character, but it portended ill.

"If Travers would only come I'm afraid he's got into trouble!"

At the moment this was said, Jack Travers was crawling into the canyon below Mount Massive, in the direction of the strange light. They would have been more than ever uneasy, if they could have known of the peril then menacing their pard.

They did not go out into the town, nor did they retire. They wanted to hear from Jack; and they wanted to be ready to repel danger, in whatever form it might appear.

"What does that mean?"

Sample standing by the window that overlooked the street, leveled a questioning finger.

The hour of twelve had come and gone.

Colorado Chris, who had thrown himself across the bed, stepped quietly to Sample's side.

A mass of men filled the street, a block above; and were moving in their direction with brandished weapons and angry outcries.

"I didn't expect it in just that shape!" in a perturbed voice.

The thing Colorado Chris had most feared had been an attempt at assassination. He had never thought the Lions would be bold enough to make an open advance on the house he and his pard occupied.

He threw up the window; and there swept to him the ominous shout:

"Down with the road-agents! Hang the thieves! They're bringin' disgrace on the town!"

Those words told much.

The Leadville Lions were pursuing a course that promised success through its very boldness. They had circulated reports to the effect that the tall man and the dude were really masquerading road-agents—members of the band that had so mercilessly taking toll on the Leadville trails.

The recent doings of this road-agent band were in the mouths of every one. Stages were held up, Express messengers robbed, and two or three murders had been committed.

It required only the pointing finger of sus-

picion to arouse the Vigilante element of the camp.

This was what the Leadville Lions had sought to do, and the thing in which they had succeeded.

Branded as road-agents, Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample would be hunted to death, if they did not surrender; and if they surrendered, a trial by Judge Lynch would give them quite as little chance for their lives.

The crimes that have been committed on the border under the sanction of Judge Lynch are manifold.

"I think we'd better vacate!"

Colorado Chris turned from the window to the door; but, when he had pushed the door open, he saw that the way of escape had been barred.

Several men were stationed under the trees and amid the rocks ready to pick off the supposed road-agents, should the latter attempt to fly. And the light of a street-lamp, falling full against the door, would have rendered the work of these marksmen easy.

As if to emphasize this, a rifle ball plowed into the woodwork above Colorado Chris's head; and a loud yell came, as an echo to the shot.

Colorado Chris ducked his tall form, hurriedly closed the door and sprung back into the room.

On Sample's face there was a look of annoyance.

"They're are deucedly bold!" he asserted.

"Ay, and will be bolder!"

The tall detective again glanced from the window.

The crowd of men that had marched down the street was now in front of the building.

One of them advanced and lifted his voice:

"Hello, there!"

Colorado Chris hoisted the window, though he half expected a shot, and put his head out.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Pardner, we want *you*, and the Jim-dandy that's in the room with ye! We want ye so bad that were goin' to git ye; and to save trouble, you might as well come down."

Colorado Chris knew that the speaker was one of the Lions.

"And if we decline to comply with your request, what then?"

"We'll come up there and bring you down!"

An affirmative yell emphasized the statement.

The situation was really serious.

There was a little balcony in front of the window; and, with characteristic boldness, Colorado Chris stepped out on this. The peril of the act was great, for it rendered him an easy target.

Septimus Sample paled, when he saw his big pard thus expose himself.

"Gentlemen! judging from the way you have advanced, and from your words, you think we've been guilty of some crime!"

This was the signal for a fierce outburst. The Lions and their friends whooped and yelled, not desiring him to make a statement. He saw, too, that many revolvers were fingered, as if the owners itched for a shot at him.

Nevertheless, he continued:

"I want to say that, in comin' here, you're after the wrong men, whoever you're lookin' for. We're peaceful and peaceable citizens! We have done nothing that we're ashamed of. We have injured nobody!"

"That's lie!" came from some one.

"What is it you accuse us of?"

"Robbin' the stages!" came back in answer.

The speaker, who acted for the Lions, waved his hands for silence.

"If you will come down, we will make it plain to you what you are charged with, and we'll see that you get a fair trial. If you don't come down—"

Under other circumstances, Colorado Chris might have thought it wise to accede to these demands; but he knew what would be the nature of the contemplated trial, and what would be its outcome. He and Septimus would be sentenced to be hung; and that sentence would be carried into effect without delay. He could read that much in the angry faces beneath him.

"You have convicted us already," he

said, and he turned back toward the window. "If you git us, you must come fer us; and I warn you that when we go under we will have plenty of company!"

A revolver cracked, and the bullet tore through the sleeve of his coat, missing Sample's head by not more than an inch.

A further stay on the balcony would have been suicidal.

"It's a fight!" the big detective stated; and though his tones had a metallic click, there was no evidence in them of craven fear.

Colorado Chris had faced death more than once, and could face it again. Like Horatius, of the brave days of old, he remembered that, "to every man upon this earth death cometh soon or late."

He could die but once!

And Septimus Sample, though his face paled a trifle, was as truly courageous as was his big friend.

"We'll make it lively for them, before we go under!" Colorado Chris grimly asserted. "There'll be the biggest funeral in this camp that ever was seen!"

He stepped away from the window, through which another bullet plunged, and loosed the revolver at his belt.

A perfect Babel of sounds resounded on the outside. The Lions were working themselves and their aiders up to the fighting pitch. This is not always easy, when such desperate men are to be taken, for then there is a certainty that some of the besieging force will bite the dust; and none wish to be among the killed.

The bullets flew thicker, cutting through the flimsy walls; and Colorado Chris and Sample were forced to cower on the floor, to avoid being hit.

A second later, there was a thundering crash at the door below.

A stairway ran from their room straight to it; and, stationing himself near the head of this stairway, Colorado Chris raised his voice in warning.

But the thundering thump of the log that had been brought to batter in the door, came again, in spite of this.

Splinters began to fly; and the hinges strained under the blows.

With a whitening face, Colorado Chris lifted his weapon and sent a ball straight through the door-planking.

A howl of pain followed the shot; and there was a hasty tumbling to get out of range. The shot had taken effect; how seriously, the men in the house could not tell.

"I'll put a ball through the first man that sticks his head through that doorway!" Colorado Chris's voice warned. "Stand back, there! I'm in dead earnest in this business!"

But the patter of feet came again; and again the log bumped heavily against the straining timbers.

And once more the revolver spoke.

The aim had been more deadly than on the first occasion. The stricken man fell back, moaningly, and was borne from the place; and for a time silence reigned about the building—not absolute silence, but a cessation of the shots and loud outcries.

But the two hedged within those walls, were not left to long enjoy the fruits of this temporary victory.

The terrifying smell of smoke was wafted to them.

The building had been fired.

The face of each paled even more than before. They knew what that meant.

It was a thing Colorado Chris had feared from the first, but which he had not mentioned: but it was an unforeseen peril to Septimus Sample.

"Better be hung or shot than to be burnt alive!" he quavered, a deep terror taking possession of him!

It was indeed a horrible contemplation, and one sufficient to whiten the cheeks of the boldest.

Looking through the shattered door, Colorado Chris saw the flames curling cruelly upward. The smell of smoke became more pungent, and a triumphant cheer swelled on the breeze.

"We are doomed!" was Colorado Chris's thought. "Nothing on earth can save us!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK'S CUNNING.

NEVER was Jack's cunning more evident than when he was grasped so roughly by the

collar and dragged by Tempest up the canyon.

He reeled, limply; and his uttered protests were excellent counterfeits of the growlings of a half-drunk man.

Even Tempest, whose suspicions had been aroused, had been deceived.

"Let up on that, will ye?" Jack requested. "I ain't done nothin' to be drug 'round that way fer! If you're a policeman, show yer badge. Otherwise, I'll lay flat down an' won't stir a peg."

Then he began to plead.

"Tell me where I am, an' I'll go off an' not pester ye! Jes' show me my boardin'-house, pard!"

The only boarding-house frequented by Jack, so rumor said, was the shadow of a veranda or the soft side of a dry-goods box.

"He's drunk!" said Truesdale. "No use yanking him that way!"

"But how did he git in hyer?" appealingly. "This hyer ain't Leadville!"

"Mebbe he'll tell, if you'll give him the chance."

Jack had been cudgeling his brain for a plausible story to help him out of this difficulty.

Nellie Tempest, strangely agitated, had gone on before, carrying the flaring lamp.

"Don't you know you hain't in Leadville?" Tempest queried. "This hyer hain't Leadville!"

"What in Sam Hill is it, then?" Jack bawled, wrenching himself loose, and starting as if to run.

He only succeeding in tripping himself on the rocks and falling prostrate.

There he lay, staring owlishly at the two men.

"You hain't Henderson?" he inquired. "Bless me, I thought you was Henderson!"

Henderson was another "bum," with whom Jack had much consorted.

"The last thing I fairly recollect, gents, I was with Henderson; and we was 'a-rollin' home, in the mornin', boys! Rollin' home in the mornin'!— Say, where is Henderson?"

His quick wit promised, still, to serve him. Henderson was given to hunting proclivities.

"Did you go out hunting, with Henderson?" questioned Truesdale.

"You bet! We went out, hopin' to down somethin'—or, ruther, Henderson was a-goin' to down somethin', an I was a-goin' to kerry it in fer him! Say, where is Henderson, anyway?"

The probabilities seemed great that the two bums had started for the hills, intoxicated, and with liquor flasks in their pockets, had got separated, or so blind drunk they knew not what they were doing, and that Travers, wandering on, had seen the glare of the lamp and thought himself back home.

Job Tempest gave a snort of disgust.

"You hain't worth payin' any attention to!"

He turned in the direction of the light, intending to leave Travers to assist himself; but Truesdale got the "bum" on his feet and helped him up the trail.

When they reached the light, Jack saw that it proceeded from a cabin, set under a ledge, against the canyon wall.

The cabin had been built there by a prospector, but it was weather-proof and reasonably commodious. It offered, at any rate, a safe retreat to Tempest, in this hour of need.

Travers viewed the cabin, with drunken gravity.

"This hyer's a town I don't know nothin' 'bout!" he avowed. "Say, this hyer hain't Leadville, is it?"

Truesdale pushed him into the room, desirous of asking him some further questions.

"Naw!" Job sneered. "This is the home of yours truly."

Travers steadied himself and doffed his greasy hat.

"I know you, now!" he asseverated. "And this yer' feller is Truesdale. Well, that there gits me! Thought I was to home; and, confound it, I'm in your cabin out in the woods! Pards, that beats me!"

He sunk, confusedly, into a chair; glanced at Nellie, deprecatingly; and swept a hand across his eyes, as if to sweep away the brandy fumes.

"Pards, that gits me! Jee-rusalem! I won't be able to git home till mornin'. And

hyer I thought I was there, a'ready! If you'll show me the road, though, I'll be travelin'!"

"The road's out there!" said Job, pointing a finger toward the canyon's mouth.

"And I don't want you to come nosin' round my cabin again!"

He desired to keep the drunken fellow in ignorance of the true situation.

"Thankee!" said Jack, lifting himself, unsteadily.

"Sit down!" Truesdale commanded. "Have a bit to eat. This isn't my house, but I make the offer, anyhow. I'm goin' into town, d'reckly, an' I'll go along with you."

He glanced at Tempest, for his approval, and Tempest nodded.

Truesdale thought it best to accompany Jack on the way to Leadville, to the more thoroughly deceive him in regard to the route, and to stamp on his mind more strongly the idea that this was Tempest's cabin at the side of the Leadville trail.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRUESDALE SHOWS THAT HIS HEART IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

WITH those crackling flames eating through the door and into the building, and the fanatical mob raging outside, Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample felt that it was a matter of only a few moments when they would be forced to a dreadful alternative.

They could remain in the room and suffer death by fire, or rush out and fall before the bullets of the mob. Either meant death, and the fiery death was the most to be dreaded.

Still, they hesitated, although hope had nearly died in their hearts.

Bullets smashed through the flimsy walls, cries of rage and haste arose, the mob crept closer and closer, like wolves creeping on the wounded stag.

The smoke grew stifling and the fire, eating further and further into the interior of the building, began to scorch with its heat.

The rooms adjoining had become involved, and the occupants had already escaped to the street, glad to get away with their lives. As for the owner of the property, he dared not protest, for fear of the aroused Vigilantes.

But all this was not viewed with equal complacency by the entire population. There were many men there who did not favor mob violence; and many others who saw in it a stigma on the name of the town, and were ready to oppose it for that reason. Still others feared the risk involved by the fire; for, should the wind shift, the whole camp would be imperiled. But all these lacked leadership; and, for that reason, did nothing.

They were unwilling, also, many of them, to show opposition to the mob leaders, knowing the fate of men similarly situated on other occasions. To oppose the mob spirit, when it was so rampant, was perilous in the extreme.

Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample dimly understood all these things; hence, had no expectation of help from any of the people of Leadville.

But aid comes, frequently, when it is least anticipated.

Like the hunted and despairing man that he was, and burning under a sense of injury and injustice, Colorado Chris had fired again and again; without being able to tell if the shots had done execution.

He had never fired, though, unless sure that his aim was directed at a member of the mob.

And now he crouched at the window—which was half obscured by the smoke—hoping that one of the bullets that flew so plentifully might single him out and end the hopeless and unequal contest.

He lifted his head still higher, for a roar had come from down the packed street; and a sight greeted him, which filled him with wonderment, if it did not renew the hope that had died.

He clutched the side of the window and weakly drew himself erect. A motley throng, amid which horsemen were to be seen, swarmed in that direction; and, in front of that throng, there leaped and danced

an eccentric figure—a figure that threw up ragged arms and cut all manner of ridiculous antics.

A name leaped to the big detective's lips: "Jack Travers!"

At the utterance of that name, Septimus Sample got up from his recumbent position, and looked in the direction indicated by Colorado Chris's pointed finger.

He saw, too, what had so electrified his friend: The street filled with advancing men and horsemen, and that fantastic, ragged figure dancing in the fore-front; and he echoed the cry of his big pard.

The wine of new life was poured afresh into the veins of the youth; and for the moment he became as frantic in his actions, as the queer, dancing figure that led the advance of the relief party.

For neither of the imperiled men doubted for an instant that this was a relief party.

They saw Jack Travers; and Jack's presence there was an assurance of that.

But how came Jack to be there, the leader of that force?

Travers was not the leader, though his actions might seem to indicate it. He was but the chip borne on the fore-front of the flood—but the foam on the crest of the in-rolling wave.

There was a power back of Jack, and that power was Donald Truesdale.

Truesdale and Jack had returned to Leadville, as foreshadowed in the last chapter.

Jack's apparent intoxication had noticeably passed away, before they reached the town; which was but natural, for the long tramp in the cold night air would have had a sobering effect on any one.

Jack Travers, however, played his part to the last, and carefully concealed his knowledge that the cabin in the canyon was other than the one customarily occupied by Job Tempest.

The mob was gathered in the streets, and the building occupied by Colorado Chris and Sample had been fired, before their coming, though the fire had not gained headway.

A few words were all that were necessary to place them in possession of the main facts.

Truesdale's sense of honor, justice and fairness was evoked.

He hated the dude on general principles; and he hated Colorado Chris because he felt that Chris had come there to make trouble for the father of the woman he loved.

Nevertheless, he was unwilling to stand by and see these men murdered on a false charge. He knew they were not road-agents; and his quick perceptions told him that the charge was trumped up, in lieu of a better, to satisfy some private grudge, or because the men were feared by some citizens of the town.

Hence, he sought for a way to effect their rescue.

"That will never do," he said, speaking to Jack, for lack of some one else to whom he might speak: "They must be got out of there! You run over to Parrott's, and tell him that I say something must be done to halt those men; and I'll rustle round and see what I can do!"

And forthwith he "rustled," in western parlance, and in the liveliest style. No grass was permitted to grow under the feet of Truesdale, when time was so precious.

Other men "rustled," too; men who had been waiting for a leader: and within twenty minutes, or less, Donald Truesdale had at his heels thirty or forty resolute fellows, some of whom were mounted.

All were armed, and were ready for a fight should it become necessary.

And thus it came about that Truesdale's force proceeded down the street in the direction of the now furiously-burning building; and Jack Travers, still playing his role to the life, danced in front, waving his ragged arms and screaming like a panther.

Apparently, if there ever was a reckless, howling vagabond, out for a lark, it was Jack Travers, at that supreme moment.

"Whoop!" he howled. "Here's what I calls life! A fight like this is me bread and milk! It's better than likker, an' likker's the staff o' life. Hold me, somebody, er I'll bu'st! Down with the mob! Down with the French Commune. *Ooee—whoop!*"

He had no weapon, seemingly; but he picked up a stick from the street, and, aim-

ing it like a gun, fired one imaginary shot after the other.

Then he tossed away the stick, beat on his breast like a gorilla, and danced again to the charge.

Few were paying much attention to Jack, however, except to grumble at him and to curse him, when he got in the way. There was more serious work on hands than giving heed to this howling brute.

But Jack Travers knew what he was about. His aim was to attract the attention of the men in the building, and so assure them that assistance was nigh; and he succeeded.

CHAPTER XX.

A MOUNTAIN HEROINE.

THE leaders of the mob element, who were really the Leadville Lions, were much incensed, when they saw this force advancing to the help of the detectives; and they redoubled their energies to get at their foes before the new force could do anything to prevent it.

But the threatening revolvers of Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample, as well as the raging fire, kept them from entering the building, or making any serious attempt in that direction.

The interior of the building was beginning to glow like an oven; and the timbers of the floor grew so hot that the detectives felt the heat through the soles of their heavy shoes. But a few minutes would be needed to drive them from the room.

They did not intend to yield, now, when they saw help so nigh.

On the contrary, they would have fought to the bitter end, thus supported, and would have added many to the already large list of wounded.

Donald Truesdale threw his force close up to the house; then advanced and called for the leaders of the Vigilantes.

"This thing shall not go on!" was his declaration, and his eyes flashed fire. "My friends, here, will not permit murder to be done. This is the spite work of a few men who are known, and who will be looked after, in due time!"

Whereat, the leaders of the Lions quailed.

But the mob was not to be driven away by words, as Truesdale was quick to see. Their thirst for blood had been aroused, and would not be satisfied.

Thereupon, Truesdale rode to the flaming door, with a number of followers; and there, facing down the threatening mob, they tore away a portion of the wall; and permitted Colorado Chris and Sample to escape from the fire.

But, though they formed a cordon about the imperiled men, they saw that the end was not yet.

So far, no shots had passed; but the loud words and threatening looks, told that the moment of combat was at hand.

Truesdale tried to retreat with the men thus rescued.

"Kill the traitor!" was the howl of the Vigilantes.

Rifles and revolvers were leveled at Truesdale, and a rush followed.

His force, though it was composed of courageous men, was inferior in numbers. The final result cannot be doubted. Truesdale and his men would have been borne back and overwhelmed; and the detectives would have been torn from their grasp and slain.

A pause in the threatening aspect of affairs was brought about by the falling in of the roof of the building. It tumbled inward, with a deafening crash, hurling a spray of fiery sparks high in the air, and tossing live coals and splinters in every direction.

A volcano seemed to have opened its throat; and the heavens burned with a ruddier light, whose glare illuminated the town.

In that pause, there came an unexpected interruption.

A young woman, mounted on a handsome black horse, spurred in between the Vigilantes and the force under Truesdale, waving a gloved hand.

Neither Colorado Chris nor Septimus knew her, or had ever seen her before. But Truesdale knew her; and also did the Vigilante leaders.

"For shame!" she cried, her face flaming almost as hotly as the glare thrown against the sky.

Her words were scornfully biting and the gloved hand was leveled at one of the leaders of the mob. She knew this man, and for that reason singled him out.

"Crofton, is this your work! If it is I should think you might glory in it!"

Her nostrils quivered, sneeringly.

Crofton shrunk, as if touched by a lash.

"Beg your pardon, Miss Marston, but this is not a time for ladies to interfere!"

He tried to assume a boldness he did not feel.

"I shall report you to father, as soon as he returns!" was her angry exclamation.

"He will not be pleased with this, Crofton; and you know it. What do you mean, by trying to murder these two men?"

"It isn't murder, miss," and Crofton tried to bluster. "These men are—"

She waved aside his attempted explanation and defense.

This young woman, Amy Marston, was the idol of Leadville—the daughter of one of its wealthiest men and most influential citizens. The man addressed as Crofton was an employee of her father, John Marston.

"If father were here, you would not dare to question me!" and her eyes burned. "Tell these men to disperse, Crofton! Do you hear?"

"They wouldn't mind me, if I did!" Crofton averred.

"Then I command them!" and she faced the confused mob.

"Men of Leadville, are you so lost to shame? Would you burn alive even the most miserable creature that crawls? I am ashamed of you—you, who are citizens of Leadville, and who ought to have some regard for the good name of the town! What kind of a report will this be to go forth into the world? Will it be calculated to bring capital here? We need capital and men here! We have riches in these mines; but they will never be developed, when the world is given to understand that life is not for a moment safe from the fury of mobs!"

Her words tingled with feeling, and fell in a torrent from her lips. Her face was aquiver with emotions that drove the color in tides. Her form dilated.

"I, who love Leadville and the mountains, am ashamed of you!"

The torrential words were not without due effect.

Men, who, but a moment before, had been wild to get at the accused, took breath, and paused long enough to do some serious thinking.

Donald Truesdale saw the changing sentiment and was quick to take advantage of it.

"I am not the champion of these men!" he cried. "I only want to see fair play. You were not giving them that! Even when you offered them the court of Judge Lynch, you had already doomed them!"

Truesdale spoke with much more exactness, when his feelings were roused, than he did ordinarily.

He was a handsome man, too, was Donald Truesdale—and a commanding man—when thus stimulated.

"Give them a day in which to get ready for defense!—If you will agree to do that, and will promise not to molest them, meanwhile, I promise to turn them over to you at that time. To turn them over, not to a mob, but to a jury that will give them a fair show!"

It was so just a proposition that it gained favor, though not with the members of the Leadville Lions.

These men saw that, if Donald's proposition was acceded to, all hope of encompassing the death of the detectives was gone, for the present, at least. Their hope lay in the hot-headedness and wrong-headedness of a mob—not in a mob which has been given time to think.

While Truesdale was making this statement, and appealing for fair play, Septimus Sample was gazing, fascinatedly, at the girl, who had so singularly come to the rescue of himself and his friend.

She was, truly, a handsome young woman. Upright of carriage, with a grace that was queenly, and a form that was girl

ishly slender, yet perfect. Her complexion was dark, yet the satiny skin seemed transparently clear, and the dark eyes, which could burn and scintillate, could also grow dreamy with the shadow of thought.

"Amy Marston!" he repeated, mentally, for the name had dropped more than once from the lips of men about him, and he wondered concerning her, even while he admired.

Amy Marston's appeals, combined with Truesdale's arguments, won the day, in spite of the counter-talk of the Leadville Lions.

The mob began to drop to pieces, as is the fashion of mobs; and, almost before the leaders were aware of it, only a few men—a meager handful—were backing them.

Seeing this, and seeing, also, that further stubbornness would injure them, they ungraciously yielded, and asked for the trial on the morrow, which Truesdale had proposed.

Amy Marston turned then to the detectives—though of course she did not know them as detectives.

"You will be safer, for the present, at father's," she said, smiling her encouragement. "And you are welcome to make it your home until you find another!"

Her beckoning hand indicated the ruined building.

Her smile was kindly, and Colorado Chris, for himself and companion, accepted the offer.

CHAPTER XXI.

UNHAPPY SEPTIMUS.

SEPTIMUS SAMPLE awakened as from a dream.

Amy Marston's eyes looked into his, and her voice sounded in his ears.

"You will be safer at father's for the present!"

She was directing her words to him.

"Thank you!" he stammered. "I am most happy to accept your offer!"

He groaned inwardly. How he cursed the lisp that disfigured his speech, and the disguise that made him seem but an inane and half-brainless creature!

He was well aware that his face reddened, and the awkwardness that he felt angered him.

He was ready to confess that he was, already, half in love with this dashing, mountain heroine; but he, nevertheless, desired to appear well in her eyes; and he knew he could not do that as the dude, Septimus Sample.

Yet he could not cast aside the character of the dude, in a moment of caprice. He must wear it, even in her presence.

He was glad when she turned from him and spoke to Truesdale.

"I hope you will also come up to the house! Father will want to talk to you about this matter, I am sure, as soon as he returns! The men you have offended may be dangerous characters!"

Truesdale pulled awkwardly at his hat, to indicate his respect.

And then, following the girl, Truesdale and his chief supporters, and the detectives, went toward the big house on the hill, which was Amy Marston's home.

The thoughts of Colorado Chris differed widely from those of his young friend. He was ready to confess the superior beauty of the girl, though that beauty affected him differently. But he was not thinking so much of her, as of the Leadville Lions and their allies.

He knew that Donald Truesdale had put his own life in danger to assist men who were comparative strangers. He admired Truesdale, for the nobility of heart thus manifested; and he wanted to discuss with him the seriousness of the situation, and to thank him for what he had done.

"If I could only win Donald Truesdale to our side, in this fight, it would be a victory worth commemorating," was his thought. "I will see what can be done!"

The Marston home was at hand.

One of Donald's men put away Miss Marston's horse; and the others of the party followed her into the house.

The Marston home was a pretentious structure, for its time; and, considering the

difficulty and cost of freighting over the long trails through the mountains, it was handsomely furnished. There were carpets and rugs on the floors; and, in the room to which Amy conducted them, a piano, which must have cost John Marston a pretty penny to convey there.

John Marston was a man who believed that an ostentatious display of wealth is always well invested. He reckoned it as a part of his business capital. It aided in placing him and his high up in the social scale. It drew about them wealthy and powerful friends. It made him strong and influential as a citizen.

Therefore, this expensive house, with its handsome furnishings, was not wholly for the pleasure of his daughter Amy. In fact, Amy's comfort and pleasure had been the least of the considerations influencing him.

Colorado Chris had seen John Marston, and had heard much of him; but had not made his acquaintance.

Amy Marston's first care was to send a servant down-town to gather what information he could concerning the feelings of the mob.

She presented to her guests a young woman, Merida Mills, who was visiting there, at the time; and she did what she could to make them feel at home.

The piano was called into requisition, and there was much music, of the kind usually heard on such occasions. Colorado Chris sung well, though his heart was not in it; and one of Truesdale's men was possessed of an excellent tenor. So that, altogether, the time sped swiftly enough.

The servant returned with a favorable report. The mob had dispersed; and, though there was much talk, there was no indication that any immediate movement was contemplated.

Then came John Marston, who had been out in the hills, looking after some mining interests.

Broad daylight came, however, in advance of Marston.

Marston was a heavy—what would be called a "tubby"—man—of fifty, or thereabouts. He resembled his daughter very little; though there was a noticeable similarity in the expression of their eyes. She was slender, and he was robust and broad-shouldered. His face was bronzed by exposure, and hers was satiny and clear. Her eyes were dark-brown, his gray.

He was a man of handsome presence, though, and a man whose appearance was calculated to command respect. Evidently, his daughter got her fiery courage as a direct gift from this parent, for no one would think John Marston other than a courageous man.

He came bustling into the house, apparently not having been forewarned of what he was to meet.

He stopped, questioningly, on the threshold, when he saw the parlor filled with men; and Amy hurried forward to explain the cause.

He showed himself graciously kind and commanding; and welcomed the guests invited there by his daughter; taking Colorado Chris, Septimus Sample, and Donald Truesdale by the hand, and giving them an individual word.

"The scoundrels! I'll look into this thing!" he declared, referring to the members of the mob. "It's a disgrace to the camp! We can't afford to have such things happen here. My dear Amy, you did just the proper thing—just the proper thing; and our friend, Truesdale, is to be congratulated on the part he took!"

Septimus was groaning again. That abominable lisp, which he felt forced to use, was giving him indescribable pain. It was too much, to have to play the part of a silly dude in the presence of John Marston and his daughter.

"I am ruined forever, in her eyes!" and he set his teeth. "She will have the idea that I'm only a brainless simpleton! It's too awfully bad!"

Amy Marston had not, however, given any indication that such was her feeling. Doubtless, she was too well-bred for that. Whatever she might think, she could be counted on to keep it in her own bosom.

Septimus realized this, and tortured himself anew.

"Can you tell me the names of the men

who seemed to be leading the thing?" Marston asked, of Truesdale.

The latter gave the names of the men who had been most prominent in urging the mob to deeds of fury.

Marston grew grave.

"Some of them are influential," he said. "They are not men to be roughly handled. I'll have to talk with them privately. I'm sure I can make them see how damaging this mob spirit is to the town. To-morrow, you say, you are to be given trial?"

He had turned to Colorado Chris.

"That is the understanding."

"I'll do what I can to see you safely through it. But I must talk to these leaders first. What can have been their motive?"

Colorado Chris did not enlighten him—not deeming it wise to say too much on the subject, until he had been given time to consider the weight and consequences of such statements.

Again a servant was sent out to make careful inquiries; and the talk drifted along until that servant's return.

Amy and Merida retired to the rear of the building; and, in due time, announced that a breakfast had been prepared and was waiting.

It was an excellent meal, too, though prepared by these ladies' hands; and Colorado Chris, who had gone through so much wearing excitement, did it full justice.

Septimus might have done the same, if the eyes of the young woman had not been on him, and the thought of the dudish lisp had not so constantly tortured him.

The breakfast was over, and the servant came back.

The town had grown quiet, the business houses were open, and there was very little evidence of the mob spirit that had dominated the night.

"I think the time has come for me to put in an oar!" Marston avowed. "I should like Donald to go with me; and there's no necessity for Donald's men remaining away from their business affairs;—but I think it would be wise—" and he turned to Colorado Chris and Septimus, "for you to remain here. I've no doubt it will be safer!"

Then he departed, accompanied by Truesdale and Truesdale's men.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DUEL ON THE SLOPE.

WORD came back from Truesdale, an hour afterward, urging Colorado Chris and Septimus to remain at the house during the day.

Truesdale was trying honestly to serve these men, although he believed them enemies. It will be remembered that Tempest had told him they were detectives. His heart would not have burned against them because of that, of itself; but, when they came here to bring disgrace to Job Tempest, and thereby to Job Tempest's daughter, they became Donald Truesdale's enemies, as well.

The causes leading Truesdale to act as their champion have been given, though a repetition may not be amiss. They were falsely accused; threatened with a terrible death; and all the manhood within had impelled him to hurry to their rescue.

He did not regret this, and would stand by them until the sudden peril was passed. Then they would again become his enemies, as well as Job Tempest's;—to be met, however, in a fair field and in a fair fight. There was nothing of the treacherous nature of the snake in Donald's character. If he decided to strike a man, he would strike him boldly and after due warning.

So he sent that bit of advice to the detectives at Marston's; for he saw that the peril lately threatening them had not wholly disappeared.

There was another bit of knowledge which had come to Truesdale, and which did not make him think more kindly of Septimus Sample. Nellie Tempest, through the talk of Uncle Isaac, had been able to penetrate the disguise of the supposed dude; and she had also been told by her father of what had occurred during the combat near the rock house: how Sample's disguises had fallen from him and he had betrayed himself as Arthur Hepburn.

This knowledge was in possession of Donald Truesdale; and of all things on the wide earth, Donald hated most the man who would for any reason, play a double part.

His was so open and bold a character that he could countenance nothing of the kind.

Hence, he had a double reason for hating the pretended dude.

"I'll help him out of this, now that I've put my hand to it," was Donald's thought, "and then, if he places himself in my way, he may look out. He thinks I'm his friend; but I'll take pleasure in telling him different, the first chance!"

And thus feeling, Donald Truesdale moved about the Leadville streets sounding the sentiments of the late mob and uttering words to allay the mob spirit.

In all this, Donald Truesdale had no knowledge of the existence of such a band as the Leadville Lions. He believed Job Tempest's story!

It is not claimed that, in all things, his motives were right; but only that they were sufficient to sustain and direct him.

Donald Truesdale, after an anxious day spent in the town, returned to John Marston's, late in the evening. The danger of the threatened men was mainly past, for the present; and this was the good news he bore him.

It had been a day of agony to Septimus. He had felt humiliated, every time the lisp fell from his lips. And he could not avoid frequent use of it, for Amy Marston spoke often to him, compelling answers.

He was glad when he was permitted to crawl away, for a few hours' rest and sleep, to a comfortable bedchamber. He was tired enough, and sleepy enough, but he wished, more than all else, to get away from the girl's presence.

Colorado Chris—keen observer that he was—had not gone unaware of the feelings of his young pard. He saw the humiliation written in Sample's face; and, when they were alone in the bedchamber, he mentioned it:

"You'll have to guard your face, my boy. It speaks too plainly, at times!"

"Confound it!" Septimus growled. "I wish I'd never heard of this infernal disguise. It makes a veritable idiot, out of me!"

"You ain't purty to look on, and you don't seem overly bright, but it's all in a good cause!" Colorado Chris reminded.

"But it might have been accomplished some other way!" Septimus protested. "My disguise is known to Job Tempest; then, why not cast it aside?"

"You couldn't, now!"

"And why not, now?"

"You ask that, after the occurrences of the night! We've been accused of being road-agents and everything else criminal, and of being not what we seemed! Wouldn't that be in the nature of a self-confession? What more proof would the mob leaders want? They could silence all opposition by it!"

Sample saw the force of this.

He dared not lay the disguise down, now, however much he might wish to; and he must guard the secret more jealously than ever.

The fact that he was disguised, and that that disguise had been penetrated by Job Tempest, made their situation critical, in view of the new enemies raised up against them.

Should that disguise be torn from him in the street, the outcome could not be foretold.

And, realizing all this, he fairly trembled.

"It ain't pleasant; but, under the circumstances, we've got to play the thing through, now! It may have been unwise, at the outset, though I didn't think so;—but, wise or unwise, you must hang on to that lisp, and to the eye-glass and cane. And, above all, keep that scar covered!"

"That scar revealed, would mean a great deal to a lot of suspicious men. It would mean to them proof of what they have accused: That we are road-agents. The road-agents have had several fights, lately; and, presumably, some of them have been hurt. That would mark you as a road agent who

had been wounded in one of the scrimmages!"

Again Septimus Sample groaned.

"Curse the luck!" he growled. "Everything's setting against me!"

"Curse it with a lisp, my dear boy! Don't forget that, please! What's setting against you, more than against me?"

Septimus colored.

"I think I understand you! You're struck with the beauty of that girl. She is a handsome creature, and I admire her. You may do that, at a safe distance, as I do. Don't go to falling in love with her!"

"Who's falling in love with her?" Septimus grumbled.

"Why, you are! A man with half an eye can see that! You've been taking the tumble ever since she appeared at the fire, on that big horse. Take my advice, Septimus, and don't do it. Save such things for a more convenient season."

It was sage advice, but Septimus was not likely to heed it.

A young man in love is not always master of himself.

And Septimus Sample was already floundering deeply in love's delicious quagmire, however much he would have disliked to own it.

Perhaps he did not fully realize this himself. He was not ready to confess it, even in his own secret thoughts.

He admitted that Amy Marston was the handsomest young woman he had ever seen, that she impressed him strongly, and that—and that—

And here he always brought his admissions to an abrupt pause, thinking of the humiliating lisp and his innate appearance.

The trial by Judge Lynch, set for that day—for this was the day referred to by all in speaking of "to-morrow"—had not been held.

Judge Lynch was an evanescent creature, who failed, in this instance, to appear. No one demanded the trial, none seemed willing to act as Judge Lynch and his jurors, and thus the trial had gone by default.

The reason was, that none of the Leadville Lions cared now to push the matter. They had no proof; nothing but accusations to bring against the accused. The temper of the mob had cooled. Hence, from their point of view, a trial would have been unwise.

This was very gratifying to Colorado Chris and his friends. It told them they were safe again, for the time; and their future safety would depend, somewhat, on their own actions. And it warned them to caution.

Although Donald Truesdale brought back so pleasant a report, Donald was in no pleasant frame of mind.

All through the day his anger had grown against Septimus Sample and Colorado Chris—and especially against Septimus.

He was resolved, in some manner, to thwart their effort to bring Job Tempest to justice.

Just how this was to be done he did not know.

Having delivered his message, he stalked moodily about, at the rear of the house, in the little patch of so-called "garden," for a long time, thinking of the events of the recent forty hours.

Many things had occurred to discomfort him; Job's flight to the canyon, which thus forced Nellie Tempest to live in a seclusion that was prison-like. She had been lonely enough at the cabin; she would be lonelier now.

Then, he knew that the part he had taken in the affairs of the night had turned many friends against him. Already his employer, who had been of the mob, had shown his disfavor. And this was Truesdale's reward for assisting men whom he hated and despised!

Yet, he found some comfort in the reflection that he had tried to do his duty; to do what was right;—and he assured himself that he would do the same again, under similar circumstances.

At an unlucky moment, when these thoughts were running wild in Truesdale's mind, Septimus Sample appeared on the rear gallery, and stepped from thence into the garden.

His coming was like the application of a torch to the slumbering demon that is im-

prisoned in kerosene. Truesdale's heart flamed.

"Good-evening, Mr. Truesdale," said Septimus, thinking no harm. "It's a very pleathant night!"

"Oh, drop that!" Truesdale snarled, in a tone indicative of anger. "You make me sick with your 'etheth'."

It was like a slap in the face.

"What do you mean by that?" Septimus inquired, though he knew full well the meaning.

"I mean that I can't stand any longer to hear you go lisping around, when I know that it's all put on. I have a very poor opinion of a man that'll pretend to be something that he ain't! It's the trick of a sneak."

The words came straight from the hot heart of Truesdale; and they brought a glow of anger to the cheeks of the pretended dude.

Donald could not see this, of course; though it was not so dark out there that he could not see Sample's face, in its blurred outlines, and the chief details of his dress.

"That's an insult which no gentleman would give!" Septimus declared, speaking the lisp hoarsely, because of his swelling rage.

"And it's an insult that no gentleman would take!"

This from Truesdale; who immediately reached forth and swept the eye-glass from the dude's face.

Sample's fiery heart could not brook this; and he returned it with a stinging blow.

Truesdale stepped back, and quickly wiped from his face the stain of blood that had been brought by Sample's cutting fist.

"I reckon, Mr. Dude, that this town is a little bit too big to hold both of us, after that. I'm not sorry you done it. It's what I wanted you to do. You can't back out of a fight, after that; and I hope you've got the grit to stand up like a man!"

His words were as cool as if no anger burned in his heart.

"You've got a sword there!" and he jerkily indicated the cane. "I know what it is; and there's another sword in the house. It's a little thing, and it'll match yours. I saw it in there this evening."

"You can take either one of them, and I'll fight you with the other. This is as good a place, and as good a time, for the business, as we'll find!"

Sample regretted, now, his hasty action. But he saw no way out of the difficulty. He could not confess that he was not what he appeared. He disliked to show himself a coward. For the time being, he forgot that the drawing of the sword-cane would be a confession.

No time was given for reflection, and his rage hurried him on.

"Very well. You take whichever you choothe. I'll take the other; and you will find that I'm not afraid of you, whatever elthe you may think me!"

Only by a supreme exercise of will power could he stick to that despicable lisp.

The words were hardly out of his mouth, before Truesdale vanished.

Truesdale was back again in a moment, bearing a slender sword, which he had snatched from the wall. It had been placed there as an ornament. Now he hoped to baptize it in the blood of this enemy.

The ground was sloping: and, as Sample drew back the swords crossed.

Sample had tossed aside the cane sheath—and the fight began.

Sample was a skilled swordsman, and had confidently expected to disarm Truesdale without trouble. But he quickly saw his error. However Truesdale had learned the art, he was certainly no novice in the use of the weapon.

The blows fell quickly; and as they were parried a rain of sparks shone in the darkness.

Truesdale forced the fighting, being savagely anxious to deliver a telling stroke; and Sample retreated before his vicious thrusts, turning aside the blows with exceeding skill.

It was a queer place for such a fight.

Sample had no desire to kill Truesdale, fiercely as his anger burned against him. His only wish was to twist the sword from Truesdale's hand, or give Truesdale a cut in the sword-arm that would disable him.

And, as he slowly retreated, keenly watch-

ing his antagonist through the semi-gloom, a boulder rolled under his foot, and he fell prostrate.

With a low cry of triumph, Truesdale lifted his blade!

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DEPRESSING INTERRUPTION.

ORDINARILY, Donald Truesdale would have despised to take the advantage thus given. He would have considered it dishonorable. But he was so enraged that he was not responsible for his actions. Reason had temporarily forsaken its throne.

He would have sheathed the sword in the prostrate body of his foe, if he had been given opportunity!

But the professed dude was quick as a cat.

An upward kick turned aside the descending blade, which thus spent its force in the earth; and Sample rolled out of the way and was ready, sword in hand, to meet Truesdale's next onset.

"Curse you!" Truesdale blurted, lunging savagely.

The lunge would have been a fatal one for Truesdale, if Sample had chosen to so make it. Truesdale expended too much force in it; and, before he could recover, Sample could have spitted him. He contented himself, however, with warding off the blow; and again aimed at the sword-arm.

The sword-cane did not reach its mark; and again Donald gathered himself for one of those wicked lunges.

Then there came an interruption.

The flash of a lamp illuminated the scene; and a girl stood before them, horror written in her eyes.

The girl was Amy Marston.

The two men fell back, as if hurled apart by some powerful hand.

Donald Truesdale looked confused; and Septimus Sample cowered in shame.

The noise of the conflict had reached Amy Marston, in an adjacent room; and she had hurried, lamp in hand, to ascertain its meaning. The sudden opening of the door had thrown the light, blindingly, on the combatants.

"What is the meaning of this?" she quavered, speaking unsteadily.

The lamp was almost dropping from her hand.

Neither of the men replied; but stood with lowered swords, in mute confession.

"For shame! You, who are my guests, fighting in this way! Mr. Truesdale, this is disgraceful! I thought better of you!"

Truesdale reddened.

The girl did not turn toward Sample, whose confusion was painfully apparent.

"I thought you were friends, Mr. Truesdale!"

"He is no friend of mine!" Truesdale asserted, looking her, at last, in the face. "Why couldn't you have staid away, an' let us finish the thing, like gentlemen?"

"Like gentlemen!" with scornful intonation.

Truesdale turned toward the house.

"It's just as you say, miss! Here, or elsewhere, we'll finish this business! I'm sorry you come, though!"

Truesdale was not under the spell of Amy Marston's beauty, as was Septimus Sample, and he could afford to express his feelings more openly.

He stepped into the gallery, and went toward the room where he had obtained the sword, giving not another glance at his late antagonist.

Sample stirred, as if to follow him.

"No more fighting here!" in a sharp voice. "You understand that, Mr. Sample! I will not tolerate it. Like gentlemen! Do you call *that* gentlemanly conduct? Fighting the man who did so much to save you last night?"

Sample felt the sting of her words.

"I beg pardon, mith!" with an awkward apology for a deferential bow. "You will not have to command me again!"

Once more he had forced from his lips that hateful lisp.

The sheath of the sword-cane lay on the ground at his feet, but she did not glance toward it, for which he was grateful. He

held the blade still in his hand, having no place to put it.

"It thyall not occur again, I promithe you!"

She was trembling and deeply agitated, and when she turned from him, he fancied it must be with loathing.

He would have given worlds, had he possessed them, to be able to recall the last few minutes. He saw himself forever disgraced in her eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DISGUISE CAST ASIDE.

AMY MARSTON vanished into the house with the lamp, leaving Septimus Sample outside in a double gloom. The skies were not more overcast than was his heart. The blackness of despair descended on him.

After the combat, with its depressing interruption, he felt so weak that he was almost willing to sink down there on the stones. How could he ever enter that door again? How could he face Amy Marston? What would be Colorado Chris's comment?

He groped for the sword-sheath at his feet, restored the cane to its original appearance, and replaced the eyeglass, inwardly groaning the while.

"What shall I say to her? What shall I say to her?" was his troubled thought. "This dude business is unendurable. I can't stand it any longer. It will make me raving mad!"

A sudden resolve came like a ray of light. He would approach Miss Marston, tell her who and what he was, and remove his disguises.

Would it be safe? Would she think any more of him afterward? Would she not despise him for the part he had been playing? He had deceived her, as he had deceived others!

And would Colorado Chris desire him to pursue such a course?

He dropped down on the stones for a moment's thought.

Some kind of action could not long be avoided. He must return into the house, as the dude or in his own proper character; he could not remain out there.

He was sure that Donald Truesdale had restored the sword to its place and gone on into town.

Just then, he did not care to question what would be the final outcome of the combat so strangely ended. The future might take care of itself, so far as that was concerned.

He cursed the fatality that had led him into the gallery, and to the garden where Truesdale had been angrily brooding.

He was ready to curse Truesdale, and to curse himself!

He was certain Colorado Chris would not favor the thing he contemplated. That astute individual had, on more than one occasion—recently, in fact—warned him to be careful about giving any hint as to who he really was. Therefore, Colorado Chris would most certainly oppose any revelation to Amy Marston.

However, Colorado Chris was not his guardian. He was of age, had knocked much about the world, and ought to be able to take care of himself and order his own doings.

He was almost angry at his own suggestion that Colorado Chris would have any reason or right to interfere.

"Bah! I'm a fool! I'm growing absolutely loony!"

He got up and stretched himself.

"Yet, what am I to do? Will she think more of me as I am, or as I appear to be? Will she not despise me, anyway?"

It was always thus. The opinions of Amy Marston were those he sought to forestall and influence, not the opinions of Colorado Chris.

Not being yet ready to enter the house, he stalked moodily about in the darkness, asking himself again and again the selfsame question.

He could not come to any decision.

In this uncertain frame of mind, he went into the house, feeling that he ought not linger longer in the garden.

Glancing across the hall into the parlor, he saw Amy Marston sitting alone at the piano.

She was not touching the keys. Her head was bowed, as if in reflection.

The sight swept away all hesitancy.

"I will not play the dude to her any longer!" Sample muttered. "I know that she is a true and honest woman: and that, if I tell her anything in confidence, it will be so held."

He saw that the curtains were drawn, thus shutting out any view from the street. Probably there would never come a more opportune moment.

The feeling of his heart swept away discretion.

He turned toward the parlor; and stood, hesitatingly, in the door, hat in hand.

His coming aroused her.

When she beheld him there, she arose.

Sample flushed painfully, for his disguises were still in place, and, to her, he was still the lisping dude.

He advanced, with trembling boldness.

"I have a few words I should like to say to you, Miss Marston!"

She noticed the altered tone and the absence of the lisp, and her speaking eyes filled with inquiry.

She placed a chair for him near the piano; which he accepted, feeling more embarrassed than ever.

His glances swept the room.

"We are quite alone, Miss Marston?" he inquired.

"Quite alone," she replied, bewilderedly.

"I must beg your pardon for approaching you in this manner!" in a voice that was cautiously lowered. "I have a confession to make, though. I think it due you, and due myself. I do not desire to be thought just what I seem; and I sincerely crave your pardon for what took place in the garden!"

"I was driven to that, miss, by anger. It was not gentlemanly, I admit, for us to fight within your very doors. Perhaps, we ought not to have fought at all. However, I don't want to discuss that, now; but to speak of another matter."

The bewildered look had not left her face.

She got up, carefully adjusted the curtains, and stepped to the door leading into the hall.

"It's a confession, you say?" when she came back. "I think you will be safe in making it here! Of course, my woman's curiosity is intensely aroused."

This was followed by a nervous little laugh.

Sample saw that she was giving him searching and covert glances.

"I'm not the fop that I seem, Miss Marston! Doubtless, you will not think it the proper thing for one to play a part?"

"However, before going further, I presume I may rely on your holding inviolate the secret I wish to impart?"

He had hurried on, almost forgetting this caution.

He was becoming cooler and more self-assured, as he advanced; as he was gratefully conscious.

She inclined her head affirmatively:

"You may rely on me, in that respect, Mr. Sample!"

"I was sure I could!" delightedly, still with lowered voice.

"Permit me to say, then, that my name is not Sample, but Arthur Hepburn!"

Her eyes opened in wide surprise.

"I am an Englishman, and am here on an important errand, which requires me to keep my identity a secret from the multitude. The safety of my own life, also, requires it!"

He pushed back the hair from the scar, that she might see it; then hastily brushed the hair into place again.

"That is a little reminder to caution that I am not disposed to forget. I got that since reaching the mountains, and while I was not masquerading. It was aimed to kill; hence, the disguise in which you now see me."

He removed the eye-glass; thus altering his appearance remarkably.

"This is a thing I detest to wear: yet feel that I must do so, for the present. The cane, likewise! It is a part of my make-up, as an actor might say."

"Years ago," and he replaced the eye-

glass, "my father and sister came to this country, and have never since been heard from."

"My sister was but an infant. My father was Lord Wildmere. It was given out in England that they had been slain by wild beasts, in these mountains. I have since had good reason to believe this was a false report. They may be dead; but, if so, I feel certain they were murdered!"

The look of curiosity in Amy Marston's face was blended with one of sympathy.

"I do not care to go into details, now; but I am searching for the man that I believe committed those murders—if murders were committed. I believe it to have been he that fired the shot which came so near ending my existence. I think I am on his trail, as you say here in the West. If I succeed in doing anything, though, I am constrained that I ought to cling to the disguise I have adopted."

"I have wanted to say this much to you, all day; but had not the courage!"

"Is that man Donald Truesdale?" and a look of pain shadowed her eyes.

"No! I do not care, now, to mention his name; but it is not Truesdale. Truesdale would never have done a deed like that."

"I should hate to believe such a thing of him!"

"You may relieve yourself of any fears on that score, Miss Marston. The difficulty I had with Truesdale grew out of another matter. I cannot explain it further, now!"

"All I wished to do was to assure you that I was not a brainless fop, for of course you could not think me else!"

"You have my sympathy!" was her earnest declaration. "Perhaps, if you would speak to father, as you have to me, he might find a way to help you. You could rely on father."

"Thank you for your kindness; but I do not care, at present, to confide in any one, other than yourself!"

She seemed conscious of the honor thus done her, and colored with pleasure. It was plain, or would have been plain to an outside observer, that Hepburn's story had much interested her and wrought on her sympathies.

Regarding him in the new light which had been turned on his character, she saw that he was a man of intelligence and probity—a man whom it was an honor to know. And the confidence of such a man is worth much.

"If at any time I can help you," and her words were earnestly spoken, "you may feel free to command me, Mr. Hepburn!"

She was not awed and dazzled by the announcement that he was the son of a lord, nor by the presumed wealth accompanying that distinction, as many young women would have been; but looked at the man back of the presumed title, and gave her friendship to that man.

"Because of the influence of my father,"—not saying it proudly—"I am often in a position to command the assistance of others; and such influence is at your service!"

He felt that he ought to tell her more, even, than he had already done; but remembered Colorado Chris; and thanked her for her offers, and promised to keep them in mind.

He was glad that he had thus opened his heart to her; that she knew him in his true light—the thought that, although he played the part of the fop before her, she would know he was really not a fop, comforted him immensely.

And the love of her, which was stirring, received a new impulse.

CHAPTER XXV.

JOB TEMPEST'S ANGER.

JOB TEMPEST was in a mental rage, as he walked up and down in the darkness, at the mouth of the canyon which held his new home.

He had been in a fury all that day; and Uncle Isaac, as was customary, was made to feel the effects of his anger.

Uncle Isaac had been in terror for his life; and once had been rescued from Job's hands by Nellie. Now Uncle Isaac slunk in the darkness of the little room that had been assigned him, not daring to utter a cry.

It had been an unpleasant afternoon, too,

for Nellie. It was plain to her that her father had taken too much liquor while in Leadville.

Job had "h'isted" this poison as a bracer, feeling the need of a stimulant. Everything seemed to him to have gone cruelly wrong. The Leadville Lions had been defeated. The men he feared were still alive. And, worse than all, it had been Donald Truesdale's hand that helped to save them.

"Cuss the girl," he muttered, kicking at an unoffending stone and thinking of Amy Marston. "Why couldn't she hev kep' her nose out of this business? What call had she to come interferin'?"

He had not been with the Lions, at the time of the attack on the house occupied by the detectives; and he fancied that, if he had been, matters might have resulted differently.

"I'd a' put a ball through 'em, even after they was in Truesdale's hands!"

And this, recalling Truesdale's seeming defection, re aroused his wrath against Truesdale; and, forthwith, he began to heap maledictions on the head of his friend.

"Confound his imperdence! What did he mean by that, anyway? Knowin' what them cusses air hyer fer—knowin' that they're after me—to play a game like that! It lays over anything I ever see! The critter must 'a' been out of his head!"

He continued his tramping, kicking at stones and sticks, and cursing savagely.

He could be heard at the house; and Nellie's face whitened.

"Father's in an awful temper, to-night!" was her reflection. "Oh, if he'd only let that liquor alone! It always makes him savage and cross, till one can't live with him in peace. He abused Uncle Isaac shamefully; and Uncle Isaac hadn't done a thing!"

She was sorrowful; though she had been angry enough, at times, during the afternoon.

It seemed a pity that such a girl as Nellie should have to bear the presence and abuse of a man like Job Tempest. It was more than a pity!

Job had not seen Donald since the latter had gone to Leadville in company with Jack.

He was still deceived as to Jack Travers's character; though he heard how Jack had been with the force so hastily gathered by Donald.

But he was not inclined to blame Jack so much for that, as Donald reasoning that the vagabond had been influenced by Truesdale.

Yet, had Travers happened along, at that moment, Job Tempest would have been inclined to trounce him for his defection.

"Ye can't trust anybody, any more!" was his thought. "You jist can't! Hyer, I thought Truesdale was a man to tie to, every time; and, fu'st jump, he flies off the handle and helps them that's tryin' to down me! Sich friends hain't wu'th the name! They hain't no friends, at all; that's what they hain't! A friend's allers a friend!"

How much longer he might have gone on in this raving way may not be known.

The sound of a footstep cut short his wrathful meditations.

It came from beyond the canyon;—and he walked further out to investigate its meaning.

A form advanced toward him, through the gloom.

It was Donald Truesdale.

Job Tempest recognized him, with a growl.

"Glad to see you!" said Donald, extending a hand, as he came up.

"Can't say the same fer you!" and Job drew back, refusing to take the hand.

"What in Sam Hill's the matter, now?"

Donald saw that Job had been drinking.

"You ought to know!" Job snarled.

"I can see that you've got too much liquor aboard, if that's what you meah!"

Donald did not like the tone used, and his quick anger rose; albeit, he felt he could not afford to quarrel with Tempest.

"That's all right!" said Job. "A drink or two, more er less, never hurts me! I wasn't meanin' that, Truesdale; an' you ought to know I wasn't!"

Donald would have passed him and gone on toward the cabin.

Job interposed his body in the path.

"No, you don't, Donald Truesdale, till

I've had a reckonin' wi' ye! What did you mean by that business? What did you mean by it, hey?"

"What business?"

"Needn't pertend ign'runc'e!" Job growled. "You know, well enough. A helpin' them that's a-tryin' to down me! Is that the way to treat a friend?"

"Oh, you mean at Leadville?"

"'Zactly! That's jist what I mean! Them men was had foul. A purtier cinch was never got on anybody; and hyer you come, a-flyin' into the thing, a-sp'ilin' it all! That's what I call a durned mean trick!"

"You wouldn't have had the men murdered on a false charge, would you?"

"I'd 'a' had 'em put out o' the way, charge er no charge! S'long's they're hyer, you know that I hain't safe a minute! You know that; an' yit you talk that way!"

There was a deep sense of injury in his words and manner.

"That may be true, Job," and Donald looked at him with some astonishment; "but, just the same, I wasn't going to see them killed by a mob, without good reason."

"Good reason!" Job howled. "What in the name of ever'thing, do you call a good reason?"

"Well, that wasn't!" doggedly.

"You're no friend o' mine!" Job asserted.

"I hope to prove to you that I am; but, whether I do or not, I'm not ready to crawlfish on what I did. I'd do it again."

"You would!"

Job became fairly livid with rage.

"That's what I said!"

Donald was also angry.

"But see here, Tempest, we don't want to quarrel. You don't see it as I do. That's all right. Let it be bygones!"

"Not by a durned sight, I wen't!"

Donald tried to pass by him and make his way to the house; and again Tempest interposed.

"I'll talk to Nellie about that. I know she'll agree with me, in saying that I done right."

"You can't see Nellie ag'in!"

"Can't I?"

Donald pushed the drunken man from the path, and sprung past him up the canyon.

Job staggeringly followed.

Nellie, having been attracted by the wordy war, and having recognized Donald's voice, had emerged from the cabin and was coming down the path.

Donald caught her by the hand and led her, willingly, back.

Then, in reply to her anxious questions, he told of the dispute and its cause.

"You are not vexed at me?" he asked, stooping to kiss her face.

"You know I'm not, Donald!" and she returned the kiss. "Father is not himself to-night. Overlook what he says!"

"I will, for your sake, Nellie!" as he passed through the doorway with her. "I suppose he's really not responsible for what he's saying!"

Perhaps Tempest thought better of it, for he did not immediately enter the house; and this break in the quarrel—if it may be termed a quarrel—saved to him the friendship of Donald Truesdale. Or, shall it be said, that pretty Nellie Tempest saved for him Truesdale's good-will? for, had it not been for Nellie's sake, Truesdale would have let Tempest fight his battles alone.

Love of Nellie was the cord that bound him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"NELLIE, I AM YOUR BROTHER!"

"WHAT do you say to trying it to-night?"

Septimus Sample and Colorado Chris were again established in a room of their own, in the town.

Only a day had passed, however.

The mob spirit having apparently vanished, and feeling safe for the time, they had not felt disposed to remain longer at the home of John Marston, even though assured by him that they were quite welcome to remain as long as they chose.

They had been very much impressed by Marston's unvarying kindness. He and his

daughter had striven to make these guests feel at home, and had so well succeeded that Sample would have been delighted to linger there indefinitely.

But Colorado Chris felt hampered there, and a removal was made.

The words quoted were addressed by Sample to his big pard.

Even while his fancy had been so tangled by the beauty of Amy Marston, Sample had not forgotten the work to which he had set his hand; nor had he forgotten that Nellie Tempest and Uncle Isaac—his presumed sister and father—were still under the dominion of the supposed John Munden, *alias* Job Tempest.

He was anxious they should not remain there longer than could be helped. He pictured Nellie as leading a very disagreeable existence; and he knew that the life of Uncle Isaac was a most terrible one.

"Now that we know where they are, we may be able to do the thing we failed in doing before!"

"Where is Travers?" Colorado Chris asked. "You recollect what he said, do you? The route of which he told you?"

"I don't know where he is. I think I might find him. But I know the way. His directions were explicit."

"Before making the effort, I should like to see Travers."

As if in response to his wish, there came a knock at the door; and, when the door was opened, Jack Travers glided in out of the gloom.

Jack had been spending the early hours of the evening at one of the chief drinking houses, and had been filling his ears with information. Jack was an ally worth having, in ticklish times like these.

Colorado Chris welcomed him, glancing at the closed door.

"Oh, you needn't try to look through a knot hole out into the dark, friend Christopher," and Jack grinned. "You may bet I didn't come in 'thout takin' a quiet peep around the premises. It's airily, an' yer uncle hain't asleep, if he do look drowsy. There hain't no Lions prowlin' round out there!"

That Travers might have been followed, was the thing Chris had feared.

"You're always careful, Travers! Take a seat. Glad you've come—we were just speakin' of you! You could go to the canyon again without trouble, don't you think?"

"Straight as a string!"

Jack looked puzzled, though.

"That's good! And now, old pard, your advice on this subject."

He then proceeded to put Travers in possession of the facts and circumstances they had been discussing.

"Same ole game, eh? Pick the primin' an' try ag'in? Well, I'm with you. I kin go there, same's a bee to the honey bloom."

"I didn't doubt it!"

"An' git drunk on air ag'in, if it's needful, same as afore! Takes the least to 'toxicate me of any man in this country. Jist wink, an' I'm drunker'n a b'iled owl. Mountain wind's all the liquor I need!"

He drew his knees up to his chin, and chuckled merrily.

His companions laughed, also.

"Travers, you're a jewel! The Rocky Mountain Trio would be in bad shape, without you. I guess you'll have to lead us to the home of our friend, Tempest."

"That sister o' yours's a mighty likely lass!" Travers commented, addressing Sample. "She ought to be 'shamed o' ye, in that rig!"

"Perhaps not, when she knows why I wear it—when she knows the whole truth!"

"Which you don't know, yourself, that it is the truth?"

That was true; and was a contingency on which they must count.

"In a cabin, in a canyon,
Excavatin' fer a mine;
Lives a miner—forty-niner—
An' his daughter, Clementine!"

Travers patted the floor with a heavy boot, as he hummed the words.

"If I was a song writer, I'd make them words fit the case closter; but they'll do! I'll hire Henderson to pound out some jingles fer me. Henderson used to pilot a country newspaper, an' could be counted on to do it grand!"

Jack Travers was in great good-humor. And had he not a right to be? The Leadville Lions had been foiled. His friends were again safe. And the plan, which had miscarried, was once more taking shape. Besides, Jack's was not a nature to brood.

"Hitching on to Henderson as you did was a great thing," said the big detective. "No one would ever suspect two such 'bums' of having any inclination for anything except likker."

"Henderson's innocent," Jack grinned. "Innercent ez a baby! B'lieves I'm a tramp, an' was postin' me up in some new trampin' an' signs, this mornin'!"

"Just keep him thinking so. It'll not be necessary, much longer!"

Colorado Chris looked at his watch.

"The distance to that canyon, Travers?" "Don't know, pard; but it hain't short. Looks like you might stroll over to that mountain for a mornin' appetizer; an' more'n likely you'd be ready for dinner, time you got there. It's like some men I know—powerful deceivin' in looks!"

He winked knowingly at Sample.

Understanding that so long a trail might be expected; and, having decided to give Job Tempest a call, preparations for the journey were commenced at once; and a half-hour thereafter the three slipped from the house and set their faces toward that point of the compass dominated by the big, snowy mountain.

It was past midnight, when they reached the canyon's mouth, though they walked rapidly.

A light still shone from the cabin window.

"Good thing I put my knife into that dog," Travers commented. "His yellin' mightn't be healthy, jist now. Lost my knife, too; fer Old Tempest didn't give it back to me, an' I was that drunk that I didn't ask fer it. That would have been *too* thoughtful, fer a drunk man!"

As he said it, Travers put himself in the advance, as he was familiar with the ground, and the trio moved toward the cabin door.

Colorado Chris stepped up to the door, and rapped quietly.

"Who's there?" came in the voice of Nellie.

"We want to see Mr. Tempest!"

There was a stir within and the light went out.

"Mr. Tempest is not at home. Who are you?"

The men outside hesitated, loth to believe she was speaking the truth. Job had not been seen in the town that night, and they had counted on finding him at the cabin.

"We're friends to you, rest certain of that."

There was an implication in this that they did mean harm to Job Tempest.

"You call yourselves friends. Who are you?"

Sample fancied he caught a quaver of fear in the question.

"Are you sure Tempest is not at home?" evasively.

"Quite sure. He started for Leadville, more than an hour ago."

"And there's no one else in the house?"

"No one but me and Uncle Isaac. Say who you are, and perhaps you may come in. But I warn you that I have a revolver, and shall use it, should it become necessary."

The trio consulted in whispers.

"She hain't lyin'," said Travers. "I kin tell that. The old gent's slipped through our fingers again. Drat the luck. He's a reg'lar weasel."

"Perhaps you'd better hide out, Travers," the big detective whispered. "It mayn't be wise for her to see you!"

"K'rect! See me slide!"

He retreated into the gloom, and again Colorado Chris spoke:

"I'm the man known in Leadville as Colorado Chris; and Septimus Sample is here at my side."

"Then you are not friends!" she asserted. "You are father's enemies, and can be no friends to me."

"But we are," and Septimus lifted his voice. "If you'll open the door and let us talk to you for a minute, I can convince you of that."

She noted the absence of the lisp, but did not particularly marvel at it, because she

knew that Septimus Sample was none other than Arthur Hepburn.

His words brought back to her the scene that morning at the spring, when he lay apparently dead, his head in a pool of water. How he had got away from there, and been restored to life, she could never conjecture.

"What is it you would say?"

"If you will open the door," Sample pleaded, "you have our solemn promise, Miss Tempest, that we will not harm you or interfere with anything in the house. It's difficult to talk through the door; and I have an important communication."

In that whispered consultation they had determined to tell her of her supposed relationship to Arthur, and endeavor to induce her to return to town with them and Uncle Isaac. They did not thoroughly comprehend the difficulties lying in the way.

The light of the lamp again shone through the crack in the door.

Then the door was unlocked and pulled slightly open.

Nellie appeared in the doorway, holding the lamp.

The light shone in the faces of the men outside.

Then the door was pulled further open, and they were told they might enter.

"I don't know if I'm doing right," she stammered, retreating to a chair near the window, at the end of the room.

Her right hand was in the pocket of her dress, and Colorado Chris knew that it rested on the before-mentioned revolver.

"Probably you will not believe me when I tell you that, after much investigation, I feel sure, Nellie, you are my sister, and that Uncle Isaac is your father and mine!"

Arthur Hepburn said this with great earnestness, standing near the door and looking her full in the face.

The change which swept over that face was plainly apparent.

It indicated surprise, disbelief, and a thrilling fear.

"You do not believe it?" he said.

"How can I believe anything so strange?" and her lips trembled. "Job Tempest is my father, and I never saw you until a few weeks ago!"

"You know who I am?"

"Yes, you are Arthur Hepburn; the man I thought dead."

Colorado Chris was permitting Hepburn to do the talking.

"That is my name, Miss Nellie. And your true name is Nellie Hepburn!"

Then, in hurried words, he told her the story of the disappearance of Lord Wildmere and daughter, and of the conclusions he and his friend had reached.

"I can't believe that I am other than Job Tempest's daughter! And as for Uncle Isaac being Lord Wildmere, that is absurd! He is an old prospector, who went crazy when a silver vein, that he thought very rich, turned out to be of no-account at all."

Sample and Colorado Chris looked bewildered.

Were they chasing a will-o-the-wisp? This statement of Nellie's seemed to indicate it. What if Job Tempest were not John Munden at all, and all their crafty plans had been aimed at the wrong man?

She saw the surprise and dismay in their faces.

"That is the truth, gentlemen. If you have been hounding my father for no other reason than this, you might as well stop it. I am Job Tempest's girl, and no lord's daughter!"

They saw that she would never accompany them to the town; and they began to regret that they had told her anything. They had revealed to Job Tempest's daughter their hand.

"Think over it and perhaps you will come to our conclusion!"

"I will think it over, yes; but I can never believe what you say about it!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HASTY LEAVE-TAKING.

A ROAR of cackling laughter drew the attention of those in the little room.

It came from Uncle Isaac, who protruded his head from the door of his little den.

Plainly he had heard everything; but had remained silent until that moment.

"It's true!" he asserted, and his eyes keenly twinkled.

He leaped through the doorway, to the center of the room; where he stood wildly waving his arms.

"You know it's true!" he declared, turning on the girl. "I'm the Lord Wildmere these two gentlemen are talking about. I was a Lord in England, once—or was it in France? It don't make any difference. And gentlemen, good gentlemen, I'm ready to go with you; and to do whatever you say!"

"Go back to your room, Uncle Isaac!" Nellie Tempest commanded.

"Commanding a lord, as if he was a child!" drawing himself up proudly. "Did you hear that? Commanding the likes of Lord Wildmere, of England!"

"Are you foolish enough to believe what that old man says?"

She addressed the question to the visitors.

"He's been crazy for these years. He'll say anything! You're John the Baptist, ain't you, Uncle Isaac?"

"I'm Lord Wildmere!" he asserted, with great gravity.

The cunning look of the insane was in his eyes.

That look said that Uncle Isaac thought this an opportunity not to be unimproved; that he desired to get away from Job Tempest's cabin, and would take any means to do it.

Seeing that look, the detectives were puzzled. They did not fully understand it. And they were wondering if Uncle Isaac, with insane tongue, were telling of what he knew, or repeating the idea he had gathered from their words.

It was a perplexing situation. What should they do?

"See here, Uncle Isaac!" said Colorado Chris.

He endeavored to fix the old man's vacillating gaze.

"Were you ever a miner?"

"No! No!" the old man cried. "Never! It is false! I am the Lord Wildmere you was speaking about it."

"He talks like a lord, don't he?" the girl sneered. "Backwoods accent, in the mouth of a lord of England! It proves itself. Of course, he's Lord Wildmere; and that young gentleman is his son, and I'm his daughter!"

The words seemed to Colorado Chris unnecessarily bitter.

But then the girl had much to make the words bitter. Her heart burned against these enemies of her father.

"Uncle Isaac can go with you, if you want him to! It's not for me to keep him from it. I couldn't, if I desired."

She referred to her powerless situation before them.

"You can take him; but you must remember that the responsibility will rest with you. I say he is not Lord Wildmere, but has been a prospector. I, who ought to know. If you want to believe him, all right!"

The detectives would have thought this parleying unwise, if they had not known that the professed bum was outside, guarding the approaches to the building. They did not think any one could get near the place, while Jack was out there.

Perhaps they relied too much on Travers's capabilities.

"I intend to go with you!" Uncle Isaac declared, endeavoring to word himself in more correct English. "I'm what I said; and I'm here against my will."

"Is that girl your daughter?" Chris asked, perplexed.

"Yes! Yes! She is my own darling child, but she will not believe it. You have heard her say she will not believe it. I have often told her she was my child!"

"Uncle Isaac!" in reproachful tones.

"It's so! It's so!" he insisted. "My own darling child, that refuses to come when her daddy calls for her."

"Daddy!" and again she sneered. "There's an English lord for you!"

"Gentlemen, Uncle Isaac never in his life told me I was his daughter. He just now got the idea from you. Never thought of it before!"

"Perhaps we'd better drop the thing, and wait for developments," Colorado Chris

whispered, in an aside to Hepburn. "The old man's almost *too* willing to go."

Arthur was the most bewildered young man in the mountains. His heart had been bubbling over with love for these two, thinking them his nearest and dearest of kin; and now he knew not what to think—what to do.

"It's as you say!" yielding himself to Colorado Chris's wishes. "I declare I don't know what to say, myself."

The thing was settled for them. There came a warning hiss from Jack Travers, who had stepped close up to the door.

Jack had heard nothing that would have aroused the distrust of an ordinary man—had seen nothing, whatever—yet he felt that an enemy was near.

As that warning hiss sounded, Nellie Tempest threw up the window, near which she was standing, and the report of her pistol sounded on the night. It was followed instantly by her call for help.

"I'm comin'!" were the startling words that arose in answer.

The voice was Truesdale's.

"We'll have to slide, I suppose!"

With this, Colorado Chris threw open the door, that had been standing slightly ajar, and bounded out into the night, closely followed by Hepburn.

They did not notice that Uncle Isaac leaped after them, clinging to their footsteps like a pursuing hound.

"This way!" hissed Jack. "There's trouble in the air, pard! Slide!"

It was a hasty and an undignified retreat. It nettled the detectives, too, more than they would have cared to confess. The retreat had been begun on the spur of the moment; and now it seemed too late to turn about and make a determined stand and learn what they might have to contend against.

They naturally inferred that Truesdale was not alone, and that Job Tempest was with him; and they knew that, in a fight against Job and Truesdale, they would have a hard battle; and, though they desired to get Tempest into their power, it was not after that fashion they wished to make the attempt.

Uncle Isaac, racing at their heels, followed them like their shadows.

It was not until the canyon's mouth was passed that they discovered him; and then it was too late to send him back, if such had been their desire. They were not sure it was their desire.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

COLORADO CHRIS'S PERILOUS UNDERTAKING.

THERE were events taking place in Leadville that promised to have much to do in shaping the movements and destiny of our friends. Something of a panic had grown up in the ranks of the Leadville Lions.

As a result of this, several of them, wishing to place themselves out of harm's way, had started for the canyon, which they knew had been recently occupied by their comrade, Job Tempest.

It was considered a secure and safe retreat; and they thought it wise to seek its shelter, for a few days.

The panic was, in a measure, baseless. The report had got among them that a number of detectives had reached the town, who had come to assist their friends, Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample.

Jack Travers was really responsible for this, though Jack had not intended it to go so far; and had never dreamed that it might prove a boomerang, striking those he wished to shelter, himself among the number.

Travers had dropped the hint to his bummer pard, Henderson; and Henderson, becoming intoxicated, had so broadly repeated it to one of the Lions, that a panicky alarm followed.

In making the statement to Henderson, which he did as one apparently having no interest in the matter, Jack claimed to have recognized some new arrivals as Secret Service men in the employ of the Wells Fargo.

His object was to have Henderson make hinting mention of this; and so, through fear, hold the power of the Lions in abeyance.

How such rumors grow and are magnified every one knows. The few detectives be-

came a score, to the frightened Lions; and then every stranger seen by them grew into a Secret Service special.

Hence, as said, a number of them had set out, that night, to take temporary refuge with Job Tempest, in the canyon cabin.

All unknowing that this force was coming in their direction, Colorado Chris and his companions, after discussing the situation, turned toward the town.

They had determined to take Uncle Isaac with them, regardless of who he might or might not be. It seemed only a humane act, even if he were not the Lord Wildmere they had thought. It would put him beyond reach of Job Tempest's abuse, and that was a thing to be desired.

They felt they had made a sad mess of the work of the night.

They had revealed themselves to the girl, Nellie Tempest, and thus had shown their plans to the man they were trying to circumvent.

If Nellie's story were true, however, this would probably not matter. They were seeking John Munden. If Job was really only Job Tempest, they did not care to pursue him further.

They seemed as far from success, at that moment, as when they had first entered the mountains.

Nothing, though, could dampen the ardor of Jack. Rainy weather was to him the same as the brightest sunshine; and disappointment added but zest to his existence. To Travers, this world would have been a poor enough place, without its little ups and downs. Smooth sailing did not please him best.

And so Jack joked and talked of their failure, as if it was not a thing to be regretted, and laughed with Uncle Isaac.

Uncle Isaac was in his element. What fabulous stories he delivered! He was Lord Wildmere, of all the countries beyond seas. He was the Corsican Subaltern, on his way to Waterloo and defeat. He was a captain of the high seas. What was he not?

It really began to seem, listening to his accounts, that they had been wild, in fancying he could be Hepburn's father.

They had proceeded only a mile or so, when they became aware that some one was following them.

Presumably that some one was Donald Truesdale.

They could not see him, but a sound that came now and then convinced Jack that a pursuit of some sort was being made.

Still, the retreating party held steadily on its way; assured that no harm could come, so long as only one man was hostilely treading in their wake.

But the time was not long when they became assured others had joined Truesdale—taking it for granted the first pursuer had been Truesdale.

What had really occurred?

Donald, skirting about to get in front of Colorado Chris and the others, had stumbled against the Leadville Lions, who were advancing on the canyon.

The meeting had not occurred near enough to the detectives to be overheard by them.

In a few words, Donald made these men acquainted with what had happened.

It must be borne in mind that he did not know them as Leadville Lions—that he had no knowledge of such an organization.

He knew them personally, however, and knew them to be friends of Job Tempest.

They professed that they had started, at that early hour, on a hunting expedition, intending to be far in the mountains at the break of day.

Their guns helped them in this declaration.

Donald stated what had occurred at the cabin; and told them that he was following the men, who were still near.

The Lions saw thus opened an opportunity not to be lost. If they could slay these detectives out here, their cause would be greatly aided.

But they did not say this to Donald. On the contrary, they appeared to accede to his request for assistance, and fell in behind him as their leader.

It was a crafty move.

With this force at his back, Donald Truesdale grew bold; and, finding again the trail of the retreating men, he pushed the pursuit

so hard that, in a short time, he came up with them.

The detectives were not trying to hide their trail, only being desirous of reaching Leadville without delay.

Their first intimation that Donald Truesdale was near, with a force—or that any one was near with a force—was the report of rifles and the whistling of a shower of bullets.

The heavens seemed to burn, and the rolling powder-smoke still further darkened the air.

Because of the darkness, none of the shots took effect; and also because the premonitory click of rifle-locks came as a warning.

The detectives had thrown themselves flat on the ground, dragging Uncle Isaac down with them.

But they could hardly have escaped, had not shelter been near.

Jack Travers knew just where he was, having carefully noted everything along that route on his previous visit. He knew that a mine, with a shaft opening horizontally into a hill, was not ten yards away. It was an abandoned mine—in fact, little more than a large prospect-hole.

"Pards, this way!" he whispered, drawing Sample after him. "This way, quick's you know how!"

The firing party had halted, to learn the effect of their shots; and because they did not know if it would be wise to make a rush in the dark. The men they were following were armed men, as they were aware.

This moment of grace was fully taken advantage of.

The detective pards, accompanied by Uncle Isaac, who was made keen by the peril surrounding him, scuttled through the grass, in obedience to the words of Jolly Jack; and shortly found themselves near the mine.

Again a spurting rifle-fire riddled the slope on which their feet had so lately rested.

Then the Lions, discovering the true situation, made a rush for the mouth of the mine.

But the hunted men were in it, having leaped like rats into the hole.

Here, crouching down, Colorado Chris and Jolly Jack returned, with their revolvers, the fire from without.

This return was sufficient to teach caution to the besiegers, if it did nothing else.

Truesdale's force drew back and consulted.

Truesdale knew that the detectives had sought shelter in the mine. How to drive them out, was the question that bothered him.

The hot fire of wrath was again burning in the veins of Donald Truesdale, who could be the most wrong-headed man in the world, on occasion, and with the best intentions.

An affront, as he thought, had been put on the woman he loved.

He had not learned from her very much; no more than that the house had been almost forced by these men. But that was as much as he wanted to know. It was sufficient to rouse his most violent anger; and, when that was done, Donald cast everything else to the wind.

Nellie Tempest had been insulted, in his estimation; and, without stopping to ask Nellie's opinion on his proposed line of conduct, he had started to dog the steps of the offenders.

Uncle Isaac sat in the corner to which he had been pushed, trembling violently. He fancied Job Tempest was out there, to take vengeance on him for his desertion of the cabin.

"Oh, do not let him get me!" was his wail.

Colorado Chris drew a small pistol from the breast of his coat, and turned it over to the old man.

"You're a man, Uncle Isaac! Defend yourself like a man! We're going to need all the help we can get here. You ought to be able to shoot a pistol!"

Uncle Isaac's keen and crafty eyes sparkled.

He knew well the value of such a weapon; though it had been so long since he had grasped one.

"Ay! I can shoot!" he chattered. "I can hit a bull's-eye at forty! When I was

the King of the Netherlands, I killed a stag at—"

But no one was giving him heed, and he subsided.

However, he crept closer to the mouth of the mine; and his attitude showed that he would use the weapon, and knew how to use it.

Shots from different directions now told those in the abandoned mine that they were hemmed in and a siege had commenced in earnest.

Truesdale had thrown his small force in an encompassing semicircle about the mouth of the mine, so that there was little chance of his enemies getting out.

The situation of the party within the mine had become critical. They had neither food nor water, and only a limited amount of ammunition. To try to break past those riflemen on the slope, would have resulted in death.

Help must come from the outside, if it came at all!

Colorado Chris whispered, for a few moments, with Travers and Sample.

"I 'low I kin make it!" Travers vowed.

"I don't intend that you shall try. You are worth more here than I could possibly be. They may try stratagem after awhile; and you are the man to meet that, with your knowledge of border-craft. I'll go through those lines for help, if a bullet don't stop me!"

The dude detective endeavored to dissuade him.

Colorado Chris was firm, however; and when the firing had temporarily ceased; he emerged from the dark mouth of the mine, and slipped away through the darkness.

None knew better than he that it was an extremely perilous thing to attempt. A false movement, the turning of a boulder, or a rustling of the grass, might bring a deadly ball to search him out.

But he dared not hesitate. He must escape from there, if he escaped at all, before the coming of day.

Literally by inches he drew himself forward, hugging the earth.

The rifle-shots had told him where his enemies were posted.

Keeping near the upper part of the hill, he crawled on; and then the "pop, pop" of revolvers from the mine told that Travers and Sample were doing their best to attract the attention of the besiegers and conceal his movements.

Rifles spouted fire in reply to the shots from the mine, and assisted in guiding him.

"If it hadn't been for Uncle Isaac, we might all have crept out in this way," was his thought.

Seemingly it had been a mistake to permit Uncle Isaac to accompany them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

DARKNESS still reigned, when Colorado Chris approached Leadville; though the dawn was not far distant.

He had consumed more than a half-hour of precious time in worming his way out of the mine and through the cordon of men stationed about it.

But he had the supreme satisfaction of believing he had not attracted the attention of any member of the besieging force; and he pictured Jack and the other mine inmates as still holding the fort.

His mind was fully made up as to the course he should pursue; and, on gaining the town, he went direct to the residence of John Marston.

In doing so, he sought unused paths and a roundabout way, and approached the house from the rear.

He climbed the fence into the garden, passed over the spot where had occurred the duel, and turned the corner of the building.

Then he halted, perplexed.

Voces sounded, warning him to discretion and silence. One of them was the voice of Job Tempest.

What was Job Tempest doing there?

This was the question that staggered Colorado Chris and caused him to sink to the ground near the gallery railing.

He had almost betrayed himself; for Job

Tempest was not six yards from the point where Colorado Chris crouched.

Tempest was speaking in a low tone, which accounted for the fact that the detective had not heard him before.

A feeling that Tempest's presence there boded him no good, swept through the detective's mind like the breath of a chill wind.

A man replied to Tempest's lowly-spoken words.

The speaker was John Marston.

Again Colorado Chris started.

What could John Marston have in common with such a character as Job Tempest?

He was not left long in doubt.

"A lot of men will have to be sent right away," was Job's earnest declaration.

"They've got 'em hemmed up in that old prospect-hole, jist this side of the canyon; an' it's the chance of our lives!"

"They mustn't be let ever git out o' there! Do 'em up, right now; that's what I say!"

All of which may need a word of explanation.

A runner, sent by Truesdale, had reached Job Tempest, in Leadville, asking for help. That runner had outstripped Colorado Chris, in the race for the town. And, now, Tempest was appealing to John Marston for the needed man.

Colorado Chris could not know this, of course; and what he heard, therefore, bewildered him.

He was determined to understand it thoroughly, however, if such an understanding could be reached.

And so he almost held his breath, in anticipation of what might be coming.

"Perhaps you're right, Job. Such an opportunity may not come again. It was a grand mistake in letting them get away from the mob. Truesdale's showing himself a true friend, though, just at the present. The only trouble is, that he doesn't understand the situation, and can't be relied on."

If Truesdale had really known what he was doing, he could have been less relied on by such men as Job Tempest.

Colorado Chris's puzzled ears greedily drank in these words. They told him more than one thing:

It would be useless to expect assistance from John Marston; and that John Marston was not at all the man he had seemed. John Marston was in sympathy with the Leadville Lions, if not one of them! and all his kindness to Colorado Chris and Sample had been but a pretense and blind.

As he began to realize this, the big detective's heart sunk within him. If he could not secure aid from John Marston, to whom could he turn? He had so relied on Marston's assistance!

The new light that flooded Colorado Chris's mind made him fairly dizzy.

"If it hadn't been fer that there daughter o' yourn, things would 'a' been diff'runt!" Tempest vengefully hissed.

Colorado Chris noticed the peculiar stress he laid on the word "daughter."

"Curse her!" came in the voice of John Marston. "She's no daughter of mine, and I'm glad of it!"

The big detective gave such a start that he came near betraying his presence.

This was an unexpected revelation. It was startling and significant. Amy Marston was not John Marston's daughter! What did it mean?

He was not given time to think of that meaning, for the talk continued, and he did not wish to lose a word.

"Course I knowed that," Tempest was saying. "I was jist hintin' that you'd been givin' her too much string. She holds her head up higher'n a pine tree; an', as ever'body thinks she's yer gal, an' she thinks it, it comes to about the same thing as if she really was!"

"I know it!" Marston admitted. "I guess I've been a fool! But a break or two like that will learn me wisdom, likely! I'll take pleasure in bringing down her silly pride!"

"You kin send the men right away?" Job continued, referring to the question that was troubling him most. "They've got to be sent right away!"

"Yes, for we don't want them chaps to slip through our fingers! You'll lead the men that I pick up?"

"On'y too glad to!"

Then the voices became less distinct, and Colorado Chris saw that the men had risen and were walking toward the other end of the gallery, stepping with the softness of cats.

"Not John Marston's daughter!" Colorado Chris mentally commented. "What can that mean?"

Then he began to wonder what he should do.

It was clear that John Marston was in full sympathy with the Leadville Lions, and greedy for the death of the men shut up in the mine.

Had the big detective arrived earlier, he would have approached John Marston for help, and would have been helped in a deceitful way that would probably have brought death to the entire detective party. Fate—a kind fate—had delayed his footsteps, and brought to him this startling revelation.

Again he asked himself what he should do.

There was no man in the town to whom he could turn for aid. Not one! The revealed duplicity of John Marston had swept away his last hope.

The outcome he could not foresee!

CHAPTER XXX.

AN UNWILLING AUDITOR.

THERE was another who heard the talk between Job Tempest and John Marston; and that other was Amy Marston.

She had slipped down from the room above, drawn by the low sound of voices. Her movements had been of the stealthiest, for she fancied a burglary was in contemplation.

She did not know, however, but that some servants might be talking there at that late hour; and so did not wish to call her father until assured of the character of the speakers.

She had the courage of the mountains in her veins. Hence, the fear of a burglary did not paralyze her faculties.

But the blood rushed, in a freezing tide, to her heart, when she heard John Marston declare her not to be his daughter. She would have liked to disbelieve the evidence of her ears. She recoiled in horror, but she could not withdraw. A species of terrible fascination held her.

She had no knowledge that Colorado Chris was crouching just beyond the gallery, and so fancied she was the only auditor.

Word by word, her unwilling ears drank in the statements of the two men.

She heard enough to tell her the nature of the mission on which Job Tempest had come. She knew the location of the abandoned mine. There were many abandoned mines and prospect-holes, but certain words and directions told her which was meant.

When they moved across the gallery, out of earshot of Colorado Chris, she stole into a corridor leading in that direction, and was able to hear their final words.

Those words cleared up whatever of mystery remained. She knew, then, that Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample were shut in the mine; and that Truesdale and a party of friends were besieging them, seeking their lives.

Like a bitter recollection came the memory of the duel on the slope. Truesdale's actions on that occasion seemed to give her the key to what had followed; and she recalled, likewise, Arthur Hepburn's statements, when he had revealed himself and cast aside his disguises.

But above all, like the knell of doom, sounded the words of John Marston:

"Curse her! She is no daughter of mine, and I'm glad of it!"

She had never heard her father—or the man she had always believed her father—speak in the tones then used. If she could have believed him crazy, it would have been an absolute relief. But she knew him to be perfectly sane.

And he made that statement! It was as if he had announced to her her death sentence. What did it mean? What could it mean?

If she were not his daughter, why had he never told her? Why had he allowed her to believe a falsehood all these years?

And who was he? *And who was she?* Was he the vile creature appearances indicated? Was he a consort of thieves and vigilantes?

His words said as much. The manner in which Job Tempest relied on him could not have been more convincing.

And her father—she still called him her father in her thoughts—had denounced her actions in rescuing from the mob those imperiled men! He had shown himself eager to accomplish their death! He had played a part in pretending to befriend them! He had deceived them, even as he had deceived her!

In this dismal, crushing, narrow circle her thoughts went round and round.

Job Tempest departed, and John Marston turned back into the house. She heard his footsteps sounding softly on the gallery steps—heard him ascend the stairway.

Even though she believed he would return shortly, and that she ought to do something immediately, she sunk moaning to her knees, on the floor.

"What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" was her moan. "I am not Amy Marston. Good God! Who am I?"

Her hands and her face were as cold as if an icy wind had kissed them. Her limbs were almost powerless. Her heart-beats seemed failing.

But she shook off the swoon-like feeling that assailed her, and staggered to her feet.

"I must do something! I must do something!"

This was her mental cry, as she stood pressing her hands to her forehead and striving to still the pain that stabbed there so cruelly.

She dragged herself heavily toward the stairway leading to her room.

A quick and desperate resolve was forming in her tortured mind. She would aid the imperiled men; and, as there was no other on whom she could rely, she must rely on herself.

Craft is sometimes stronger than the force of arms and the power of might. She could use craft. It was the only thing left her, for she dared not appeal to any one in the town. Whom could she trust, after those words of John Marston's? Whom could she believe?

Yet these men in the mine were seemingly doomed, unless aid reached them! They were already surrounded by superior numbers; and a greater force was to be immediately sent to the aid of their enemies.

She reached her room and sought blindly for some heavier clothing and wraps. She tried to don them with haste, but her nervousness delayed her. She dared not strike a light.

However, she secured, finally, what she desired; and again sought the stairway. The house was quiet and seemingly deserted. She did not know if John Marston was in, or whether he had gone out into the town.

It mattered little, in either event, so she did not encounter him;—and she stole softly down the stairway, her shoes in her hands.

Just beyond the garden was the stable, sheltering her horse.

She meant to saddle the horse and ride swiftly to the old mine. She knew she must reach that point in advance of Job Tempest and his reinforcing party. If she failed in that, her efforts would be useless.

The courage of her strong purpose strengthened and sustained her. Yet her mind was in a whirl; and constantly echoed those terrible words of John Marston, declaring she was not his daughter.

She crossed the garden and reached the stable, without interruption or mishap.

The horse gave her a whinnied greeting; rubbing his soft nose against her dress, as she glided in at his side.

Impulsively she threw her arms about the neck of the noble brute, feeling that he was the only friend she had on earth. And her voice choked with sobs; and tears filled her eyes, for the first time.

They brought a measure of relief to the pent emotions of her heart.

"You are true! You are true, Major!" and she smoothed the shining neck, lovingly. "It is men who deceive and live lies, not the so-called lower animals!"

Then she began to put on him the bridle and saddle, working in constant fear of discovery and with nervous haste.

A little later, she rode from the stable, her

eyes fixed on the house. But she was not seen; and, ten minutes afterward, she was beyond the limits of the mining-camp and flying across the country.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A WILD RIDE.

THERE was a dim path across the undulating and uneven country, but no recognized trail. She did not seek for a trail, but endeavored to take the most direct course.

This would have been difficult, had not the dominating peaks of the range already caught the rosy suggestions of the coming dawn.

She glanced back tremblingly, now and then expecting to see or hear the advance of the reinforcements Job Tempest would doubtless bring. In such an emergency Job would not be likely to waste unnecessary time.

Her horse was speedy; a fact on which she congratulated herself. She ought to be able to outstrip anything coming out of Leadville. And so, with coaxing encouragement, she urged the animal to his best gait.

The sun came up, through a break in the eastern mountains, when over half the distance to the mine had been covered.

From the point she then occupied, Leadville was not in sight; nor could she determine if Tempest's men had started. She tried to reassure herself on this score, by riding to the top of the knoll. But the intervening trees baffled her.

"I am but wasting time!" was her thought; and once more the big black steed was thundering over the trail, with great speed, yet remarkable ease.

She drew him down into a gentle canter, as she neared the mine. A horrible fear was at her heart. The work she had come to prevent might be already accomplished. The mine might hold no prisoners; only dead men.

The reassuring sight of riflemen, lying in concealed places on the lower slope, brought the color back to her cheeks. The siege was still on. There had been no surrender. But (and again the color fled from her face) there might have been wounds, or death!

And, as if to emphasize this, a puff of smoke and a report came from one of the rifles, and a splinter of granite was seen to fly from a boulder near the mouth of the mine.

She set the horse in more rapid motion. This deadly duel must be stopped.

Yet her heart sunk when she saw she had been sighted by the besieging force, and knew there was no retreat.

One of the men descended the hill toward her, when he saw that she meant to ride straight into danger, where the balls were flying so continuously. There had been much firing through the night.

He was the one in command of the force—Donald Truesdale.

Her heart hammered violently, but she rode straight toward him.

"I've ridden hard to bring you an important message, Mr. Truesdale," she said; and she knew the inward agitation was apparent in her outward manner.

Donald bowed. His fear had been that she had come to ask him—to plead with him—to end the siege and permit those within the mine to depart in peace; and he had hardened his heart to refuse the request.

"I rode straight from home, Mr. Truesdale. Mr. Tempest came there to see father; and, after they had had their talk, I rode here as soon as I could. It is their wish that this business should not be carried further. They think it unwise; and I came to tell you of their decision."

A more thorough falsehood was never told in the interest of mercy!

Amy Marston had conned this speech on her way out there, determining just what she would say. To her mind, there was no other way to save the lives imperiled in the mine. And she believed the boldest of lies justifiable; that a lie was not only justifiable, but demanded by the circumstances.

Donald looked confused. He had not expected this.

"I don't know as either has any call to

"interfere!" said Truesdale, frowning. "This is my little affair; though I did send a runner into town to Tempest to send help!"

He was puzzled as to what he ought to do.

"What makes 'em send an order like that?"

Amy shook her head.

"Job Tempest thinks it's for the best, after having had that talk with father. They didn't inform me further; but only said for you to withdraw your men, and start at once, with them, for the camp. The order was imperative; and I don't doubt they had the best of reasons for sending it!"

Donald Truesdale did not, for a moment, think of doubting the truthfulness of her story. It was accepted as genuine; though he doubted the wisdom of the order thus brought.

He was not pleased, as she could see; and her heart trembled, lest her bold scheme should fail, after all.

She was expecting Tempest, with the reinforcements, at any moment; and she knew that, if that body of men got there before Truesdale's withdrawal, the last hope of saving Colorado Chris's party would vanish.

She almost held her breath, while Truesdale debated the question.

He was not as bloodthirsty as the night before, but he did not intend that the party in the mine should depart. He meant to make that party surrender.

He struck the toe of his boot, savagely, into the soil.

"I reckon I'd ought to obey the orders you've been kind enough to bring!" was his declaration.

He had not been watching her face closely, or the look of relief might have warned him. A hopeful light was in her eyes, and her cheeks glowed.

"Thank you," she said, endeavoring to conceal the happy quaver in her voice. "I shall ride on to the canyon and tell Nellie what you've done, and that you've set out for Leadville."

There was a question in the tones.

"Will you?" and Truesdale showed that the statement pleased him. "I'll be obliged to you, if you will. I was thinkin' that she ought to know."

Amy Marston had no desire to ride on to the canyon; but she wanted to get away from Truesdale, before he could have a chance to learn that she had deceived him; and this ride to the canyon was the only thing she could think of as an excuse. Besides, she desired to inform the occupants of the mine of what she had done, as soon as the opportunity came, and urge them to instant flight from the place.

"I don't just understand it," Truesdale commented, referring to the order she had delivered, "but, of course, it's all right! There's a good reason back of it, or such an order wouldn't have come."

"The best reason in the world, without doubt!" she assured.

This conference, or talk, was attracting the attention of the riflemen on the slope, and the firing had wholly ceased.

Most of them knew her as Marston's daughter, and they knew, almost to a certainty, that her coming concerned them. They did not dream, however, that she could have come to injure any of their plans.

"I'll speak to the men about it," said Truesdale, turning away, "and we'll be back in Leadville, as soon as we can get there. I reckon we're needed there!"

She inclined her head.

The fibs she had been uttering sat heavily on her conscience, notwithstanding the fact that they had been uttered in a good cause. Amy Marston was not a girl to relish falsehood.

She wondered, as he turned away, if those in the mine were in position to see what was occurring out there; and she wondered, if they did see it, what were their thoughts!

They would, no doubt, recognize the big black horse, if they did not recognize the rider.

Truesdale walked over to where three or four of his men had grouped themselves.

"Orders to drop this thing, and make for Leadville immediate!" he said. "Brought by Marston's girl."

Their faces paled.

This was ominous. Such an order from

John Marston meant trouble for their friends in the camp.

"What's broke loose up there?" one of them asked; and all thought of the Secret Service men supposed to have come into the camp in the last few days. They did not question the truthfulness of the bearer of the message.

"Don't know!" was Truesdale's puzzled reply. "I reckon, though, we'd better do it!"

"Can't afford to do anything else. If Marston's in trouble—"

He stopped short, remembering that Truesdale was not one of the Leadville Lions, and that it might not be wise to say too much.

"Yes, I reckon we better had!" he bunglingly concluded the sentence. "Marston wouldn't sent such orders, if it hadn't been necessary!"

"So I thought!" said Truesdale, though he was not yet satisfied.

He didn't want to obey the command.

Amy Marston, sitting the horse nervously, beyond earshot, and watching them with perturbed gaze, saw Truesdale turn again in her direction.

The seconds seemed interminable—the minutes hours. She knew that Job Tempest might appear at any time; and then her tissue of falsehoods would be torn into shreds and all her efforts come tumbling down.

She saw the men, with whom Truesdale had been talking, beckon to other members of the band; and saw all of them drawing together.

"Oh, if they would only hurry!" was her prayer. "They move like snails!"

"This is a matter demanding haste, you know!" she said, when Truesdale was once more at her side.

"Yes, miss!" and he touched his hat.

"We'll be under way inside of ten minutes, and we'll git to Leadville as quick as we can! I suppose you don't know just what's broke loose there? You don't know exactly why the order was sent?"

"No!" and she falsified, this time, with an effrontery that astonished her. "I don't know why the order was sent. I only know that I was told to hurry, and to tell you to get there as soon as you could!"

She felt her words trembling again, and said no more; but sat on the big horse, as he turned away, and watched, with furtive glances, the dim trail leading toward the distant town. And her prayer was that Job Tempest's coming might be delayed until those in the mine could escape.

And she sat thus, until Truesdale's men were in motion. Then she pushed the big horse up the slope. She could not wait till they were out of sight; for she feared to delay the delivery of her message.

Truesdale's men passed around a point of timber; and she leaped from the big black and ran to the mouth of the mine.

Jack Travers and Septimus Sample had ventured to thrust out their heads to ascertain what had occurred.

"Fly! Fly from here!" was her exclamation. "Do not delay a minute, if you value your lives!"

They stared their wonderment; for, though they had seen her and had hoped much from her presence, they did not yet comprehend all.

"They have gone," she hastily explained. "They have started to Leadville, on a false order I brought them. And you must not stop here a minute. Job Tempest is coming with help; and, as soon as he meets Truesdale, all of them will come straight back here!"

Her manner was agitated and her words breathless.

Uncle Isaac came to the mouth of the mine and peered out.

"Fly!" she repeated. "Fly, for your lives!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

CHRIS IN THE SADDLE.

COLORADO CHRIS was in a despairing frame of mind, when he turned from the home of John Marston and set his face toward the heart of the town. He was at a loss to know what to do. The party hemmed in in the mine must have help, and at once; but where was that help to be obtained, now that John Marston could not be relied on to furnish it?

It was a perplexing and alarming situation.

Colorado Chris knew not which way to turn.

He could go back to the mine, crawl through the line of besiegers, and stand with his friends till the end came, though that end might be death; but that would avail little. It would be the needless laying down of his life.

The talk he had heard clung to him. It had been of a character to puzzle, but he thought he understood it.

"John Marston is one of the Leadville Lions," was his comment.

"Yes; and John Marston is the John Munden we're after. I haven't a doubt of it. We've been on the wrong trail. John Marston is John Munden; and, if the girl is alive, Amy Marston is the missing daughter of Lord Wildmere."

He was irresistibly driven to this conclusion. Marston had, himself, stated that Amy was not his daughter.

And Amy was the kind of girl Colorado Chris would have selected for the dead lord's daughter.

They had made a great mistake, he and Arthur. Uncle Isaac was nothing but a crazed prospector. Uncle Isaac's manner had already nearly convinced Colorado Chris of that; and Nellie Tempest was, as she had stated, no lord's daughter, but only the daughter of Job Tempest.

It was all clear, now, to the mind of the big detective; and he accused himself of blindness in not seeing it before.

An accident had revealed it to him; and he could take no credit for shrewdness in making the discovery. But he was glad to know the truth, no matter how the knowledge came.

But there were more important matters, even than this, demanding his attention, now. Arthur Hepburn and Jack Travers were in deadly peril of their lives, to make no mention of the old man who had accompanied them from the cabin. They must be saved from the fate that threatened; and he must find some means to save them.

How was it to be done?

He knew that Job Tempest would be on the way to the abandoned mine in a very short time; for Job Tempest's words had said as much. And Job Tempest would be accompanied by a force sufficiently large to overwhelm all opposition. And what could he, Colorado Chris, oppose that force with?

Seemingly nothing.

Then he remembered a man in the town who had stood manfully at the side of Truesdale, that night, when Truesdale saved him and Sample from the mob and the flames. He would make an appeal to that man! He did not know how influential the man might be, or if he was possessed of any influence. However, it would be worth trying. It could result in nothing worse than failure.

So he turned in the direction of this man's residence.

The man was one of the merchants of Leadville—doing a small business—and Colorado Chris had more than once passed his house.

It seemed almost a foolish idea; remembering that the man had come at Truesdale's call, on the night of the fire, and that Truesdale was now leading the forces against which he would be asked to assist.

But Colorado Chris knew that the man was right-minded and honorable; that he had not come, that night, because Truesdale had called, but because he thought it his duty to assist in saving the men whose lives were threatened by the fire and the Vigilantes.

"I can but try! If I fail, I shall return to the mine. That will be the only course left."

Thus plucking up courage, he walked into the street leading to the residence he meant to visit.

It was a late hour in which to call up a stranger; for the merchant could be termed nothing else. Colorado Chris had never spoken a dozen words to him.

There was no bell; and Colorado Chris rapped heavily with his knuckles.

A window was hoisted above, and a voice called, inquiringly. It was the voice of the merchant.

"I want to see you for just a few min-

utes!" the detective explained. "It's a matter of the utmost importance."

The head was withdrawn, the window closed, and, after a wait of a few minutes, the door was opened.

The merchant stood before Colorado Chris, lamp in hand, and only half-dressed.

He recognized the detective and invited him in.

"It's cold in that room," he said. "You won't want to wait till I can build a fire? I see I'll have to put on a coat!"

He set the lamp on a table in the room indicated, and hastened off; and Colorado Chris, grudging the moments, impatiently awaited his return.

"I hope you'll agree with me that it's a matter of importance, Mr. Larson, when I have explained,"—the detective began, as the merchant came back, fully dressed.

Then the detective plunged into a recital of the reasons inducing him to arouse the merchant at that unseemly hour.

"Those charges are very serious!" Larson asserted, looking grave, and at the same time glancing at his watch. "You couldn't have been mistaken, I suppose, in what you heard?"

Larson referred to the disclosures concerning John Marston.

Colorado Chris had thought it wise, in asking this man's aid, to take him fully into his confidence, feeling sure, from Larson's actions, that Larson had no sympathy for men like the Leadville Lions.

Colorado Chris declared that there could be no possibility of error.

"There's only one man I dare ask for assistance, and I'm not sure that he'll give it! He has been on intimate terms with Marston!"

He gave the name of this man.

"Don't approach him!" the detective pleaded. "I know him to be one of the Lions!"

Larson was appalled.

"Can it be true?"

"Nothing is truer! I recognized him at a meeting of the Lions, which I had the good fortune to witness, one night. He's not a man to be trusted!"

"Then there's no one else! If he's not to be trusted, I know not who to trust!"

"I'll tell you what I'm willing to do, though!"

His head was bowed and the detective saw that he was carefully weighing his words.

"I'll go with you, and do what I can to help you."

"Alone?"

"Alone! There'll be no greater danger to me, possibly, going that way, than with a force. It's perilous anyway."

"But I can't ask you to risk your life, that way!" and the big detective got on his feet.

"Pardon me, but I think you can! And I'll go with you. Something may turn up in our favor. I can go as well as some other man. I've neither chick nor child, should I go under!"

Colorado Chris saw that this was an opportunity such as the merchant would have chosen of himself. It offered excitement and peril, which is as the breath of their nostrils to many men in the mountains. Larson would have aided any stranger similarly circumstanced, and would have rejoiced in the opportunity.

Seeing this, the detective waived his objections. He must have help. Larson was a courageous man. Two could not do much, perhaps; but two were better than none.

"I've two horses in the stable, just the kind we'll want!" Larson declared, his eyes flashing as the excitement grew on him. "We can be under way in ten minutes. What did you say is the distance?"

The detective stated it.

"Come this way, then, and we'll start without delay;—unless"—and he halted—"you wish to try to get some one else!"

"There's no one else I can turn to," with a somewhat sad shake of the head; smiling, the while, at the eagerness of his new ally.

"Very well, then; we're off!"

He drew a big revolver and cartridge-belt from a drawer, buckled them to him, and led the way from the room.

Less than ten minutes later, the two rode from the place, bent on as perilous a mission as any ever undertaken. No knights of the days medieval ever contemplated anything more truly heroic.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NELLIE TEMPEST ASKS SOME QUESTIONS.

When left alone by Donald Truesdale—who had started out in hot anger on the trail of Colorado Chris, Septimus Sample and Uncle Isaac—Nellie Tempest began to reflect on the declarations of her alleged brother.

She had scoffed at Sample's words, even though she knew him to be Arthur Hepburn. His statements were so preposterous, at first glance.

But she was to be given much time for thought. She found it impossible to sleep, after what had occurred, that night; and, for a long time, she paced up and down the narrow confines of the cabin, reviewing the many exciting occurrences of recent times.

Then she went out into the open air, for her cheeks were flushed and her temples throbbed painfully.

Her memory went back to her earliest recollections. They were all of the mountains. Her mother died when Nellie was an infant—as she had been told; and she could not recall that mother's face. There was no daguerreotype, nor likeness of any kind, of her mother, that Nellie had ever seen.

Job Tempest was not given to retrospection as a rule—at least not to verbal retrospection; and, as a consequence, the years lying in that, to her, distant period were dim and misty.

However, she believed she had been born in the mountains.

She had said that Uncle Isaac was a crazy prospector. She reflected now that she had no proof of this, other than the statement of her father. Uncle Isaac had always been a member of their family, so far as she could remember. And it did seem singular, when she came to think about it, that Job Tempest should have supported the old man all these years.

But then, Job had claimed him as a distant relative, and perhaps that accounted for it.

She was not willing to believe Arthur Hepburn's story; and as she walked back and forth, under the night sky, she was trying to thoroughly convince herself that it held not the remotest possibility. And, to do that, she gathered up every thread of recollection.

There was one thing though, that disturbed her. She had often noted her utter lack of resemblance to her father. She was no more like Job Tempest than a duckling is like a strutting, fighting turkey cock.

In no single feature did she resemble him. Yet she had seen other daughters look as little like their fathers. Perhaps she followed her mother in form and face.

In thus trying to prove that she was really Job Tempest's daughter, and not the daughter of an alleged lord, the effort was not undertaken because of any great love for Job Tempest. She merely did not like to be thus rudely roused from the belief of years and told that she was not what she had always thought herself. She was content with being simple Nellie Tempest, beloved of Donald Truesdale; and cared nothing for titles and riches beyond far seas in a land of which she knew next to nothing.

In her imagination, London was almost as distant as the moon.

There came many bitter thoughts, too, as she walked up and down the rocky path.

Job Tempest had not been a kind father. It was true he had not treated her as harshly as he had treated Uncle Isaac; but he had been filled with rough words and oaths, and there had been an entire absence of any show of affection.

She had often read, in story books, and in the newspaper stories, which had drifted by chance into her home, how fathers had been affectionately loving to their children; of how they had taken them on their knees and kissed them, told them stories and smoothed their hair.

Nothing of this kind had ever come to Nellie Tempest. She had not expected it, strangely; not thinking that Job Tempest owed her these things.

But, now, the memory of this remissness came to her with rankling force.

Still, she was not ready to believe—and she told herself she would not believe—the very improbable story related by Arthur Hepburn.

"It's preposterous bosh!" she declared, addressing her remarks to the morning star.

And, then, she turned back into the cabin.

She wondered where Donald was—and her father; and she thrilled a little with fear as she thought of Donald in pursuit of the men who had visited her at the cabin. She had not wanted him to start after them in that reckless manner.

Her troubled thoughts drove her out again into the night;—and she trod the path, thinking far from pleasant thoughts, while the rosy hues of the morning tinted the peaks and crept with softening light into the valleys, driving away the shadows that lurked there like grim monsters.

Her uneasiness grew, with the advance of the morning; and after a time she felt she could not remain there longer, thinking in that maddening round.

Her fears for Donald's safety increased. He had told her he would be back by daybreak, or would endeavor to send some one.

But, Donald had not felt that he could spare any man from the force about the mine.

She nibbled at a hastily prepared breakfast, but had no appetite.

Then she climbed the highest butte in the vicinity and started off toward Leadville.

The haze in the lower valley and the clumps of trees hid everything.

"I'm going to town!" was her assertion.

But she did not immediately put the resolve into execution.

However, after many long minutes of indecision, she arrayed herself for the journey and set out afoot.

There was no other way by which she could go, but she thought little of the toil-someness of the journey.

She clung to the main trail—or most direct route, for the so-called trail could scarcely be followed;—and thus did not pass near the abandoned mine which had witnessed the siege.

The siege, however, was ended.

Donald Truesdale with his small force had turned back toward the town, in obedience to the false command brought by Amy Marston, and those who had been imprisoned in the mine were hurrying to attain a position of greater security under Amy's guidance.

When a third of the way to Leadville, she beheld a group of men that puzzled her. They were resting quietly, and seemed to be awaiting the coming of some one. They were hidden from the view of any individual coming from the direction of the mountains; and it was only by a lucky chance that Nellie Tempest caught sight of them at all.

After a careful scrutiny of them and their surroundings, she descended into the hollow which they occupied, that puzzled look still resting on her face.

She had recognized her father and Donald Truesdale, and wondered that they should be camping in that spot, after that fashion.

Later she learned the reason:

Job Tempest, hastening to the assistance of those about the mine, having at his heels the men got together by John Marston, had encountered the retreating force of Donald Truesdale.

A few words had let Truesdale know he had been deceived by Marston's daughter.

"It's all right!" said Job. "They can't git away. 'Sall right!"

Job, before leaving Leadville, had drank too much liquor for his own good. He had felt the need of a stimulant, and had imbibed pretty freely, and now was ready to take a rooseate view of everything.

"That gal lied to ye, but they can't git away! We'll jist camp down hyer an' lay low, an' let 'em walk into the trap. Tha's what we'll do! 'Sall right, Donald, my boy! Th' can't git away, I tell ye!"

Thereupon, he had issued orders for the camping.

Donald was chagrined beyond measure, and also angered at what had been done. It was a base deception, he thought, unworthy of Amy Marston; and he was at a loss to account for it.

His only theory was, that Amy had become enamored of the pretended dude, and had risked her father's wrath to save him.

Job was in command of the force, and Donald could do nothing but obey. However, he sent scouts out in various directions, to learn what had become of the refugees, for he knew the old mine was no longer occupied.

And now they were waiting for reports from these scouts.

It was presumed that the detectives and the old man would strike straight for Leadville;—and that, therefore, it would be a waste of time to send men to the mine to take up the trail there, when the same end could be more easily gained by searching the country lying between Leadville and the mine.

Donald was thinking, also, of sending a runner to tell Nellie he was safe and to acquaint her with what had occurred.

Such was the status of affairs, when Nellie discovered the party and descended the slope.

Nellie was chagrined at Job's intoxication. Chagrined and humiliated.

He was sitting under one of the trees, smoking, and taking affairs with the easy unconcern of a drunken man. She saw that Donald was disgusted with Job's conduct.

After speaking a few words to Donald, to secure enlightenment as to what had taken place, she advanced to where her father sat.

Nellie Tempest was not pleased with what had occurred. But she put this displeasure aside for a moment. She had resolved to ask Job Tempest some direct and searching questions.

He seemed less than ever her father, as he half reclined under the tree, with that drunken, debauched look on his face.

She was less than ever desirous of posing as his daughter.

She reasoned that this might be a good time—the best of times—for learning the truth. Fools and children, and drunken men, are likely to speak what is in their minds.

Job was sufficiently removed from the other men to give encouragement to her desires. Conversation with him would not be overheard, if it was in any manner guarded.

"Here you come, girl!" he said; and he frowned. "'Tain't no place fer ye! Better be to home!"

"I haven't any home worthy of the name," and she dropped down at his side; "and—" (she looked him fairly in the face,) "I'm not sure that I have a father!"

"Eh?" and the pipe half dropped from his mouth. "What's that you're sayin'? Hain't got no pap? What d'ye call me?"

Her eyes were shining.

"Are you really my father? Am I a daughter of Uncle Isaac?"

A queer look came to him.

She almost fancied it was a look of confession.

"Who's been puttin' sick nonsense into your head?"

"Are you my father?"

He took the pipe from his mouth and tried to laugh.

"Uncle Isaac's yer father, o' course! Sing-lar you never knowed that afore! You two look as much alike as peas. Reg'lar twins fer looks, you two air!"

His words were sarcastic.

"I've been told that you are not my father, and that Uncle Isaac is. I'd like to know the truth—and I will know it!"

"Who told you that?" Job queried, the puzzled look increasing.

There was also a suggestion of fear in his glance.

"One of the men you've been hounding, told me that. The young man that was killed and came to life again!"

"An' I wish he was dead fer shore!" Job gritted. "An' he will be, if ever I git my fingers on him!"

She saw that he was evading.

"Answer me!" In a peremptory manner.

Job grinned, drunkenly.

"Answer ye what?"

"Are you my father?"

"You hain't got no father! Ye hain't got no mother! You're an orphan. Ye never had any pappy ner any mammy. Ye jist growed!"

"You're whatever ye want to be. Go 'long off, an' don't pester me!"

Nellie turned from him with purpling face, for a footstep had sounded, and she saw Donald standing at her side. She saw, too, that Donald had heard Job's words, and probably her questions.

There was an odd look on Donald's face. She could not fathom it.

Donald had not meant to overhear anything; but he had come forward to question Job. He had, however, heard a great deal, too much, entirely, for his peace of mind.

"What's that you're saying?" he asked, directing his remarks to Job Tempest.

"None of your dod-rotted bizness, Mr. Truesdale!" was the drunken and wrathful answer.

"Very well!" and Donald turned away, a sudden fear hammering at his heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOVE KNOWS NO BARRIERS.

NELLIE TEMPEST saw the anguished pain on Donald Truesdale's face; and she immediately rose and followed him.

"What is it, Donald?" she questioned, her tones full of sympathy. "Nothing that father said, I hope?"

Donald halted and hesitated, waiting till she reached his side.

"I'd like a few words with you, Nellie!" glancing uneasily at the men grouped near. "I don't know, though, that this is the place to say 'em!"

Nellie had meant to ask Donald to abandon the thing on which his heart seemed set, as soon as she found a chance to speak with him; but this thought vanished, temporarily.

She saw, now, only the troubled glance of the man she loved.

"What is it, Donald?" she repeated.

"I overheard more'n you thought," he faltered. "I didn't mean to play the sneak and hear things I'd no business hearing, but I couldn't help it. And I'm worried about it; and that's a fact!"

Involuntarily, almost, he turned with her toward the thick growth of pines on the slope back of the camp. They afforded the refuge he desired—a place where he could speak, without being overheard, and where his actions would not provoke comment.

She accompanied him, willingly.

"I hope you're not worrying about what father said?"

"Is he your father?" Donald asked. "What made him say that?—or, rather, what made you say what you did?"

She saw she would have to tell him all.

And she began at the beginning, and related the story told her by Arthur Hepburn, not concealing anything.

The troubled look on Donald's face grew.

"If that's true," and his voice faltered, "it's all up with us, Nellie! Pray God, it may not be true!"

She was startled, there was such depth of emotion in his words.

"I do not understand you, Donald!"

"Pray God it may not be true!" Donald repeated, in that solemn voice. "You could never be anything to me, then!"

They had turned the bend of the slope; and the hand he had drawn through his arm, trembled.

He felt it quivering, and pressed it in his hard palm.

"I don't see why you do not understand! Could a rough mountaineer like me marry a lord's daughter?"

"But I am no lord's daughter!"

"I hope you aren't! I sincerely hope you aren't!"

"It would make no difference, if I was!" she protested.

"You don't know what you are saying, Nellie, when you say that! I know it would make a difference; and you'll know it, in time! You think, now, it wouldn't; but it would! You couldn't afford to ruin your life—your future—by marrying me!"

"I should marry you, Donald, though I were the king's daughter!"

He stooped and kissed her, for those impulsive, loving words; and she returned the embrace, with affectionate fervor.

"I'll know the truth of this thing," he said, turning back with her along the path they had come.

"Don't be harsh with him, Donald!"

"I'll know the truth!" and he set his lips firmly. "It's important that I should!"

"No matter who I am, or what I am, Donald, remember that I have given you my promise, and that promise I mean to keep!"

He was not thinking of that, just then. He was thinking of his present relations to

Job Tempest. He was fighting Job's battles for the sake of Job's daughter—and, now, if she were not his daughter?—

A sense of injury done awoke his anger.

He parted from her, when near the camp, and turned aside for the intended interview with Job.

Job was still half-reclining under the tree, pulling at his odorous pipe. His manifest intoxication did not increase Donald's respect for him.

"Heered anything from the scouts?" Job asked, striving to rally seeming interest in the affair that he knew ought to interest him. "A lazy lot, them scouts air! I low they couldn't foller the trail of a mule wagon!"

"Nothing," said Donald. "They've hardly had time to report, yet!"

He threw himself down on the grass and looked into Job's whisky-swollen face.

"We'll everlastin' lay them fellers out if we git 'em!" was Tempest's bloodthirsty declaration.

"I just come over to ask you a question or two," Donald admitted.

Job took the pipe out of his mouth and gave a drunken stare.

"Eh?"

"Just a question or two!"

"B'ile along, then! Questions is gittin' ruther thick this mornin'!"

"To ask you the same questions she did?" and Donald indicated Nellie, who had strolled on.

"Then ye needn't to ast 'em! D'ye think I've nothin' to do but answer questions?"

His manner grew pugnacious.

Donald was not to be put off, however.

"I want you to answer me straight, Job Tempest! I expect to marry that girl; and I want to know if she's your sure-enough daughter!"

"Fix it to suit ye," replied Job, sticking the pipe back into his mouth, and sucking at it as if that were his main business in life. "It's all one an' the same to me. She's my girl, an' she ain't my girl, jist as you please!"

"But it ain't the same to me!"

"No, I don't low you'd be proud o' me as a dad!"

"It isn't that," said Donald.

"You'd be a deal prouder of her, if you thought she was rich and high-mighty, an' all that!"

"I want a straight answer!"

Donald's eyes flashed, for his anger was getting the better of him.

"She's your daughter or she isn't! You ought to know, and you can tell!"

"Well, I won't!" Job asserted.

In that answer, Donald fancied the truth lay hidden.

If Nellie were really Tempest's daughter, Tempest would say so. There would be no need of denial or prevarication.

"She's not your daughter, then?"

"Fix it to suit ye," was Tempest's cool, and even insolent, reply. "That's what I said, awhile ago! She is, or she hain't; jist as you please!"

Job, in his intoxicated state, fancied he was showing a deal of cunning. He disliked these questions, and thought he had evaded them very well. But he had only succeeded in making Donald believe the story told by Arthur Hepburn.

Donald got up, and turned back to the camp, his brain on fire.

"I'll not strike another blow for him!" was his thought. "I've stood by Job Tempest, through thick and thin; and he's been deceiving me, all the while! Let him fight his battles alone, after this!"

The thought that Nellie was not what he had always believed almost drove him wild. He feared the meaning to be that he would lose her.

Donald, in spite of his many disadvantages, was well-schooled in the ways of the world. He knew the deceitfulness of the human heart, when once the lust of ambition and the desire for place and power sets its seal there.

Nellie believed, now, that she would always be true to her plighted vows. But would it not be different, when she saw what the future might hold for her as the wife of some man eminent in the world—if that eminence was only the eminence gained by wealth and rank?

Donald feared she would, and this fear was a cruel torture.

But he did not mean to lose her, if he could do anything to prevent it.

He would not wrong her, he would not try to withhold from her the knowledge he fancied he had gained; he would not try to make her think she could not find a husband more suited to her,—but he would cling to her with a love that knew no abatement, and draw her to him, still, by the strength of that love!

But he would no longer serve Job Tempest.

Nellie had not advanced to the camp, but was strolling aimlessly about, awaiting the result of Donald's interview. She was anxious as Donald had been, over its outcome.

She turned up the slope, when she saw Donald part from Job; and Donald hastened to overtake her.

"It's true!" he said, and there was a sob in his voice, as he overtook her and they walked on together. "He is not your father!"

She was startled by those words.

"Are you sure?"

Her whole form shook.

"Certain as I can be. He didn't just say so; but he said enough to tell me it's so! That Hepburn spoke the truth;—and—and—that—here his voice broke again—"he's your brother."

"And Uncle Isaac is my father?"

"I suppose so! It can't be otherwise. And, oh! Nellie! the meaning of it all!"

"You think I'll not be as true to you as if it wasn't—as if I was Job Tempest's daughter, as we've always thought?"

Her tones were reproachful.

Careless if the men saw him, he put his arm about her waist, and drew her closer.

"Will you be true, Nellie? Will you, no matter what comes?"

"I will, Donald!" and a dash of tears wet her face. "I love no one but you!"

Her mind was in quite as much of a whirl as Donald's; but of this one thing she was sure.

"God bless you, Nellie! I don't deserve the love of such a girl; but I'll be as worthy of it as I can!"

For a moment they walked on in silence.

"I mean to leave here!" he confessed. "I sha'n't fight *his* battles any longer. He's deceived me, and got my help in that way;—now let him help himself!"

"You are going to leave him here, and the men?"

"That's what you've been wanting me to do, isn't it? You said almost as much, I thought?"

"Yes; I wanted you to drop this business, Donald;—but—"

"I'm going to Leadville as fast as I can go; and you're going with me! I hope you won't refuse!"

"What for?—Why are you going to Leadville so suddenly?"

"To undo the wrong I've been doing? Those men that I've been chasing are true men. They've told no lies. From this on I'm with them, to help them if I can; and, if not, to see that they're not killed!"

"Why not order your force back, then?"

"Because it's not my force! It's your fath—it's Job Tempest's! I think I see now that they wouldn't obey me if I gave such an order! And Job would countermand it, and they'd stand by him. But I've friends in Leadville—"

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ANGEL OF DELIVERANCE.

AMY MARSTON, when she rushed tremblingly up to the mouth of the old mine, crying out for its inmates to fly for their lives, almost fancied she could hear the patter advance of the expected reinforcements under Job Tempest.

"You haven't any time to lose," she urged.

"Hooray!" screamed Uncle Isaac, waving his arms triumphantly. "We've licked 'em! We've scared 'em away!"

Disdaining caution, he ran out on the knoll, and looked across the valley toward the force which Truesdale was leading in the direction of Leadville.

"Better climb down!" Amy urged.

"There are others coming, and you may be seen!"

She had hastily acquainted Jack Travers and Arthur Hepburn with what she had done;—at the same time expressing surprise at not seeing Colorado Chris. She had expected to find him there instead of Jack Travers.

Full explanations were not possible, however, at that time; and the two emerged from the mine, commanding Uncle Isaac to come down from the knoll.

A short conference induced the party to place itself under her guidance. It would not do to fall into the hands of their foes; and to avoid this contingency a wide detour was commenced.

It seemed pretty certain that the forces under Truesdale and Tempest would form a junction at an early moment, and that they would then come hurrying back, angered by her deception.

It was not possible that her duplicity could long remain concealed.

Therefore, every yard placed between them and the mine was that much gained on the road to safety.

There was one thing to cause fear; and that was the horse ridden by Amy Marston. Moving across the open country, it would be a prominent feature of the landscape, which must be seen for long distances. A consideration of this fact made her willing to abandon the animal; but neither Jack nor Hepburn would consent to this.

She might desire to rely on the speed of the horse for security against pursuing enemies.

Amy Marston was perfectly familiar with the country, and she placed herself at the head of the little party, realizing her great responsibility in so doing.

Amy Marston was a handsome young woman, seated on that magnificent black horse; and Arthur Hepburn was more enamored of her than ever. He thought he had never seen so queenly a woman. Her eyes shone with the excitement of the moment, and her cheeks glowed with health and exercise.

He was supremely glad, now, that he had removed his disguise, that night, and acquainted her with his true character. He could not have borne to assume the lisp; which he had discarded during the last few hours, while associating with Jolly Jack and Colorado Chris. It was not necessary to return to it, now, when she knew him for what he was.

He was anxious concerning Colorado Chris, who had set off for Leadville to bring help, and whose hourly reappearance had been anticipated.

There was no way by which they could notify him of what they had done, or of the dangers that now menaced him.

Should Colorado Chris, with a small company, encounter the united force of Truesdale and Tempest, his little band would be cut to pieces.

In spite of this anxiety, Hepburn continued to cherish thoughts of Amy Marston—and nothing, apparently, could shake Jack from his careless, easy-going jollity.

Uncle Isaac was as merry as the morn. He would have danced and capered like a released school-boy, if he had been permitted—and, in spite of commands to silence, he chattered on like a magpie.

The men kept close at the heels of the big horse, walking rapidly, and scanning the country for evidence of danger.

They saw no more of Truesdale's party, for some time, and began to cherish hopes of reaching Leadville, and even of being able to send help to Colorado Chris, should it develop that he needed it.

But their dream of escaping scot-free was brought to a rude termination.

A body of the scouts sent out by Truesdale sighted the black horse; and, when these scouts had assured themselves of the character of the party thus piloted, a rifle woke the slumbering echoes.

The ball plowed up the earth in front of the big black, and so startled him that he came near hurling his young mistress to the ground.

Perhaps the shot had not been aimed to kill, but only to warn Truesdale's party of the discovery.

Amy grew white with fear, and Hepburn's face became grave.

"We've been discovered!" was his cry.

"Anybody kin see that," said Jack. "The thing to know is where to git? There hain't a badger-hole anywhere about, I'm afeard!"

But Amy Marston knew of a cave-like place at the top of a rocky hill, which she suggested as a temporary refuge. She thought they might hold the place until help would come from Colorado Chris's party.

Fortunately the hill was near, and she led the way toward it at a trot, the men running at the heels of the horse.

They did not tarry to return the fire of the scouts, though other balls began to whistle about. Time was too precious to be squandered, to say nothing of ammunition.

Uncle Isaac plucked out his pistol and would have turned to fight out the battle then and there, had he not been bidden to come along with the others.

"Whoop!" he cried, throwing off the quiet he had been forced to assume, and glad of the opportunity to shriek again. "When I was general of the English forces in the Crimea—"

"You had sense enough to run when you couldn't fight!" Jack broke in. "And run's now the word. Git! Slide!"

And all threw themselves into the race with such energy that the hill, with its cave-like aperture, and its natural fortress of stone, was reached.

The big black horse was relieved of bridle and saddle and driven across the slope, to be out of harm's way; and the fugitives crouched in the hole, that seemed to have been prepared by kind nature for their shelter in this time of need.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TEMPEST MEN ON GUARD.

COLORADO CHRIS was in a desperate frame of mind, when he rode from Leadville in early gray of morning, accompanied by Larson, the merchant.

Though both were well-mounted and well-armed, they knew how great were the odds against them.

There was a strong presumption that Job Tempest had departed in charge of the force which Marston had promised to send. This combined force would be simply irresistible. The detective and Larson, with the three men imprisoned in the mine (one of whom was insane) could not hope to successfully combat those who would be thus arrayed against them.

Yet Colorado Chris, and his companion as well, meant to do what they could;—and Colorado Chris, so far as he was individually concerned, did not intend to return to Leadville alive without bringing Hepburn and Jack with him.

As for Uncle Isaac, Colorado Chris, fearing that a mistake had been made there, was willing that he should be returned to those who had, perhaps, the strongest claim on him—even though they treated him cruelly.

At the same time, he promised himself that he would look into Uncle Isaac's case, and do something for the old man, should the chance come in his way.

Mingled with these thoughts were reflections concerning John Marston's daughter;—and more and more there grew on him the conviction that John Marston was none other than John Munden, and that Amy Marston was the missing daughter of Lord Wildmere.

Altogether, there was enough to keep his mind extremely busy, as he cantered along at the side of Larson, looking carefully for any evidences of the near presence of enemies.

He feared that Jack and Hepburn had not been able to hold out so long, though he well knew their valor; and, when there seemed no danger of exciting suspicion thereby—for the cabins of miners were to be seen about—the speed of the horses was increased.

It was a long, hard ride.

But the two did not continue on to the old mine. Something brought them to a halt; and that something was a puff of white smoke.

It came from the shot which was fired by the scout at Amy Marston's horse.

Colorado Chris and his companion were too far away to make out with any certainty the dim figures that were so indistinct and so far away.

The shot brought other figures into the field of vision.

It had been fired mainly to attract the attention of the men at Job Tempest's camp; and it had succeeded in doing this.

A body of men swarmed out of the timber belt—which has already been described.

They were of the combined force of Tempest and Truesdale, and represented almost the entire strength of the Leadville Lions.

Truesdale, however, was not at their head.

Truesdale, smarting under the sense of the injustice done him by Tempest, had already left the camp, and was on his way to Leadville with Nellie.

The appearance of the men from the timber warned Colorado Chris and Larson to increased caution. And the number of the party which had shown itself caused their hopes to droop. It seemed impossible to cope with so large a body.

At the same time, they were much puzzled. They were sure the shot had been fired at Jack and his companions, for there was none other in that vicinity on whom such a fire would be likely to be directed.

But Jack was not where Colorado Chris expected to find him; *i. e.*, at the mine!

However, feeling sure that the shot had been aimed at Travers's or Jack's comrades, they were also sure that that old mountaineer had not quitted the mine without good and sufficient reasons.

Therefore, the proper thing to be done was to ride to Jack's assistance.

They would have done this, if the men coming from among the trees had not interposed.

"I'm afraid we'll have to abandon our horses," said Colorado Chris, in a tone of deep regret. "But we'll ride, first, as near to that hill as we can get."

Job Tempest had placed himself at the head of the combined force, even though he was not in a condition to command with skill and judgment.

Job now knew that Donald had deserted him, and that Donald had taken Nellie. He was infuriated because of this; and, when the shot from the scout brought him to a sense of present duty, he had been striving, in a muddled way, to concoct some scheme of revenge.

But this was cast aside. Even in his drunken state, he had lost none of his hate of the detectives, nor anything of his desire to secure his safety by putting them out of the way.

Larson and Colorado Chris saw Tempest's force hasten in the direction of the high hill, whereon Jack's party had taken refuge; and, when they felt that they could do so without discovery, they galloped in the same direction.

They kept the screen of the trees between them and Tempest's men; but, when the timber belt was reached, they found they could go no further, on their horses.

Colorado Chris was puzzled by what he saw—by the evidences of a temporary encampment; but he gave no time to search for a key to the riddle.

But, though anxious to hasten to the relief of his friends on the distant knoll, there seemed no way by which this could be done. There was very little cover between the two points; and, even though he and Larson should gain the vicinity of the knoll, there seemed nothing they could do on their arrival there.

From the concealment in the timber, they watched Job Tempest's men gain the slopes below the hill, and saw the smoke and heard the reports of shots.

A lively rifle and pistol duel followed; but those on the hill seemed to be able to withstand the assaults of their foes, and Colorado Chris took hope.

"If they can only hold out till night!" was his comment. "Something may be done, then, to aid them!"

He knew that to rush heedlessly to the assistance of his friends, would be but to sacrifice his own life and Larson's without avail.

If he did anything, it must be by a resort to strategy.

His great fear was that the hill would be carried by assault; or that further assistance would arrive from Leadville, for the Lions.

The horses were turned loose in the timber; and Colorado Chris and Larson sought to get as near the hill as they could, to be ready for whatever might occur.

It required a deal of crawling and creeping to save themselves from the eyes of the scouts, and many hours were consumed in crossing the space that intervened.

They could hear the rifle-fire at intervals, returned now and then by the revolvers of those on the hill—all of which told that the siege was still in progress, and that their friends had not surrendered.

"If they can only hold out till night!"

Over and over Colorado Chris said this.

Job Tempest—if Colorado Chris had but known it and could have taken comfort therefrom—was still in no condition, by reason of his recent heavy drinking, to take due advantage of his opportunities; and, while there were some good fighting men in Tempest's force, there were few who cared to lead a direct assault on the rock fortress at the top of the hill.

Hence, the work of routing the party under Jolly Jack, from its place of security, made little headway.

And the day dragged along, and nothing was accomplished.

Colorado Chris became so uneasy, at last, that he left Larson and circled the hill, keeping well concealed the while; and, when he had accomplished the round, and lay at the base of the mound of high rocks, he believed he could work his way into the inclosure.

Putting a handkerchief on top of a stick, and pushing this little flag of peace before him as a protection from the shots of his friends, he crawled up the slope.

He took advantage of a hollow, or small ravine, which led him half-way to the top of the knoll.

Strangely enough, he was not seen by any one within the rock fortress, and his exceeding care kept him from being seen by any of the enemies scattered on the lower slopes.

He gained the rim of the rock wall; and lay there for a few minutes, sheltered by a big boulder, and fearing to lift his head, not knowing but that a ball from one of Tempest's men might bring his earthly career to a sudden end.

And, lying there, there came to his ears the sounds of low voices from within the inclosure.

There was, as has been said, a small hole, resembling a cave, behind the rocks that crowned the hill; and Colorado Chris was now lying with his head against the wall of that cave.

The voices were those of Amy Marston and Arthur Hepburn.

Jolly Jack Travers and Uncle Isaac were at the other end of the little fort, keeping close watch on the men below; and Hepburn and Amy had withdrawn to the shelter of this hole.

Hepburn believed that Colorado Chris was dead, and that help could not come to them from any source. Even Jolly Jack had about lost hope, though he would never have been the man to admit as much.

Many hours had passed since Colorado Chris had set out to bring them help from the town.

They were ringed in by relentless foes, bent on their death; and no way of escape appeared. For hours they had eaten nothing, for hours they had been subjected to continuous watchfulness and excitement, for hours they had thrilled with alternate hope and fear; now they believed they were doomed.

Amy Marston's clear eyes saw all these things quite as plainly. Her effort had been in vain! All she had accomplished was to link her fate with theirs!

She might be saved, as the daughter of John Marston; but, after the way she had deceived Truesdale, she expected nothing.

The fact that she was not Marston's daughter, and which had so weighed on her, was not forgotten; but it was given second place in her thoughts now.

The love that had grown so strongly in the heart of Arthur Hepburn was increased, rather than diminished, by these distressing circumstances.

Her actions and words more than once led him to believe that that love was, in a measure, returned.

He was resolved to know! It would be a

consolation—and it was a duty to her, he thought, to make confession of that love while he could.

And the words of that confession were the words which reached the ears of Colorado Chris, as he lay with head pressed against the granite wall.

"I must tell you how I love you," had been the trembling admission; "and I do so because I believe that love can never avail anything. Otherwise I could not be so bold!"

He began in that way: and then went on, with increasing courage, laying his heart at her feet.

Other words were heard by Colorado Chris. Words spoken by Amy Marston, who had informed Arthur she was not John Marston's daughter.

"Your love is returned, Arthur! You have my promise to become your wife, if we ever should get out of here!"

They were pitifully pathetic, and told of the hope that had passed.

"My God!" was Colorado Chris's thought. "And she his own sister!"

Then, at a desperate bound, scorning the aim of the sharp-shooters, he leaped the wall, and stood before them.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TRUESDALE ON HIS METTLE.

BEFORE abandoning Job Tempest, Donald had secretly endeavored to induce some of the men to leave Job and return to Leadville. It had been a ticklish thing to thus approach these men, and Donald was not slow in discovering his mistake. The men were there; many of them, because of the peril they felt themselves to be in, quite as much as through a desire to aid Tempest and Marston.

When they would not hearken to his words of advice, Donald had stealthily left the timber belt with Nellie, and set out on foot for Leadville.

They might have taken horses; but to have done that would have been to expose their plans.

Nellie was an excellent walker, however; accustomed to feats of pedestrianism; and they reached Leadville in due time, without meeting any obstruction to their progress.

She went immediately to the home of an acquaintance; and Donald set vigorously to work to undo, if possible, the wrongs he felt he had committed.

In his own singular way, Donald Truesdale was a right-minded man. He was hot-headed and impetuous, given to fits of anger, but loyal to what he thought the right.

To any cause which he believed just, he gave himself with his whole heart. And he had, also, that rare virtue, of being able to acknowledge a wrong when recognized and to turn against it.

He felt he had been basely deceived by Job Tempest; and, by reason of this deception had been lured into conflict against one who was really the brother of Nellie, while fancying himself fighting the battles of Nellie's father.

The discovery was most humiliating.

Relying on the faithfulness of the friends who had come to his assistance in such numbers on the night made terrible and memorable by the rising of the Vigilantes, he again sought those friends; telling them the truth, as he understood it, and imploring their help.

A number of them were willing to respond; and Truesdale's agents began to rally the force he desired.

In doing this, he was forced to come out boldly against John Marston; and to declare Marston to be a two-faced scoundrel, who was secretly lending aid to the enemies of the men he was pretending to befriend.

Job had not thought it necessary to conceal from Truesdale the fact that the reinforcements brought were men sent by Marston. Hence, Truesdale felt amply justified in making these charges.

And the charges were made with such vigor that Marston's friends could not keep from hearing them.

Rumors were coming into town, now and then; and news of the conflict, raging in the open country between the town and Mount Massive, began to spread and to excite comment.

Men began to array themselves, according:

to their individual preferences and without at all comprehending the matter at issue.

Not a few of them did not care what the fight was about. It promised a day's excitement and that was sufficient to enlist them.

However, the friends of John Marston were, at the same time, doing what they could to hamper Truesdale and make his task difficult. Truesdale believed, too, that they were sending more men to the scene of the conflict.

While he was talking, in his energetic way to a friend in the street, making his statements in his usual reckless and open manner, Nellie appeared before him.

Her conscience was oppressing her. She had not lived so long in the belief that she was Job Tempest's child, without becoming saturated with something of those feelings of filial duty and respect which every child owes to even the worst of fathers.

She feared that Truesdale, in his hot-hearted wrath, would do bodily injury to Job, and she came to urge him to a charitable course.

"It's all right, Nellie," he asserted, giving her a loving smile. "I'll try to do what's right! Not a hair of his head shall be injured, if I can prevent it!"

Then he dismissed her, and turned again to the task that was so engrossing his attentions.

But he found the work growing difficult. Suspicions and conflicting reports turned some from him; others were seduced, and delays occasioned, by Marston's friends; and it began to seem that, after all, he would not be able to accomplish the thing he hoped.

And the hours were flying; and the men out in the open country, battling for their lives, might be in sore straits!

At last, when the afternoon was waning, and he was becoming sure that help was being hurried to Job Tempest, he got together the half-dozen men who were proving themselves true under all circumstances and standing by him through good and evil report, and turned toward the towering peak.

It was a late hour: precious time had been lost; what had happened he could not know, and his heart was heavy, as he put his little force in motion.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CASTING AN ANCHOR TO WINDWARD.

THE strong hand of fear tugged at the heart of John Marston.

He had not gone unaware of the occurrences of the day.

He knew of the doings of Donald Truesdale, and runners kept him posted as to the condition of things out toward Mount Massive.

Colorado Chris had been right, in believing John Marston to be a member of the Leadville Lions. Marston not only belonged to that guilty organization, but was its leader.

However, the thing that now troubled John Marston most was a bit of news just brought in by one of Tempest's men; a bit of news that will be revealed in due season.

It was of a character to startle John Marston; and, coupled with what Truesdale had been doing, increased his growing sense of uneasiness.

As the reader knows, John Marston had been a very prominent man in Leadville affairs. He had posed as the owner of three or four mines, which he held, however, as the agent of the Leadville Lions.

Like many men who have flown high in the mountains, as well as elsewhere, there was very little strength in the wings that buoyed him.

He had been what is termed a "high roller;" had spent his money liberally; had entertained magnificently; had professed to be an enterprising and public-spirited citizen.

He had done all this, because it pleased him, and because it gave him the influence and power desired by himself and the members of his band.

Few men would have suspected the magnificent John Marston of being an unadulterated fraud; and in that fact had rested his security.

He had puzzled, during the day, very much over Amy's strange conduct.

It had been most astonishing conduct, viewed in any ordinary light.

He was inclined to adopt the view that an inconsiderate love of Septimus Sample was its occasion. But this did not thoroughly satisfy him.

A guilty conscience is quick to take alarm. A very wise man, in the wisest of books, tells us that "the wicked flee when no man pursueth," and this is as true, to-day, as when the words were penned.

Even though no foe was knocking at his door, John Marston was ready to fly.

He walked uneasily up and down the room, revolving the occurrences of the past few hours.

He felt that there was no man in Leadville with more cause to fear the detectives, Colorado Chris and Septimus Sample, than himself.

He knew more of the reasons inducing them to come into the hills than he would have cared to confess to his most intimate allies. And the hope he had cherished, that they were to be speedily disposed of, was vanishing.

His anger burned against Donald Truesdale. He accused Truesdale of traducing him in the street that day, and of turning friends and adherents against him. He accused Truesdale of working to thwart the efforts of Job Tempest.

He had been pleased, when Truesdale's arm had been lifted in his cause; now he could not hate the man strongly enough.

From a window of his room, the ragged little camp, bearing the name of Leadville, lay spread out before him; and the occurrences in the streets were all within the field of his vision.

The Leadville of that day was not a pretty place. Few booming mining-towns are. The citizens of such towns apparently have no time to beautify streets and adorn houses.

The sun was rapidly declining.

After a hasty survey of the camp, John Marston tramped into another room and approached a heavy trunk.

This trunk he unlocked; and from it extracted a buckskin pouch that seemed to contain a quantity of gold nuggets.

He bore the pouch into the other room, where the light was stronger, and poured its contents out on the table.

Instead of nuggets, a number of gems were revealed. There was a necklace of creamy pearls, a number of rubies, and three or four large diamonds that flashed under the light of the dying sun.

A smile came to Marston's face.

These gems represented the secret savings of many months. He had not been fair in his dealings with his fellow members of the Lions' organization any more than he had been fair in his dealings with other men.

He appropriated to himself more than his share of the band's nefarious earnings; and, as opportunity occurred, he had turned this money into the gems that now lay before him.

Feeling that there might come a day of reckoning, in which no friend would stand by him with the fealty which wealth would show, he had thus cast an anchor to windward.

Marston's eyes shone strangely, as he looked at the jewels on the table. They represented a considerable sum of money, and were readily transmutable into money. With them in possession, he would be safe against want in almost any quarter of the globe.

"It's a good thing I saved these up!" was his thought, as he contemplated them, "They're likely to come in handy, if the bottom tumbles out of everything, as it looks now that it might. Curses on those rascals, and on that scoundrel Truesdale!"

He put the gems back into the pouch, and the pouch into an inner pocket, and recommenced his pacing up and down the room.

The more he thought on the precariousness of the present situation, the more uneasy he grew.

"A little scare like this, brings everything tumbling about a fellow's head, without a minute's warning! There'll be a dozen men asking payment of small debts, to-morrow, who'd have been willing to let them run for months, otherwise!"

He cared little enough for the small debts he might be called on to pay, but referred to the manner in which summer friends desert when clouds begin to lower.

"A curse on all of them! They're not worth a thought. I'll say good-by to them, willingly, if the opportunity is given, and it becomes needful for me to get out of here."

However, he was not yet ready to admit that he was defeated. He would not do that, as long as he had no knowledge of the positive frustration of his plans.

He was still hoping that Tempest's men would be able to down the detectives and all the men Truesdale could bring to their aid.

The rumors that the town had filled up with detectives, in the past few days, he fully believed.

Growing more uneasy, as the time passed, he descended from the house and walked out into the town.

He could not be unmindful of the glances cast on him. Many of them were unfriendly glances; and such he had not customarily received in Leadville.

He sought the room of a man who had been an able assistant in many schemes he had worked to fill his pockets with money.

That man was a lawyer, with an office in a little side street; but that lawyer had never been one of the Leadville Lions.

With full knowledge of what the Lions were doing, he had been too shrewd to associate with them as a member of their organization. Oh, no! he would not do that; but he had advised them, in a legal way, and thus assured himself safety.

A man may be attorney of a criminal, may possess knowledge that his client is a criminal, and yet not lay himself open to a word of reproach.

This shrewd and foxy lawyer knew that full well; and remained only the legal adviser of these men, pocketing, however, in the way of fees, a generous share of their guiltily-acquired money.

Marston turned into the shabby street; and made his way up a flight of shaky stairs to the attorney's office.

A keen face, with small eyes set far back in cavernous sockets, greeted him, when the door opened, in response to his knock.

Marston pulled the door tight behind him, as he glided into the office.

"The wind sets squarely, to-day, Mr. Keener!" was Marston's observation.

"Brewing a storm, I'm afraid," Keener declared, peering at his rascally client. "A wise captain puts for a port, in such cases, I believe!"

"You mean that you think I'd better do likewise?"

"I'm paid by you to give advice," said Keener, still fixing Marston with that look. "I've heard some remarks, this afternoon, that would indicate the wisdom of such a course. If you go on the rocks, of course I'll try to help you off; but, as I said, a wise captain—"

This bit of oracular wisdom did not tend to allay John Marston's uneasiness. He relied much on Keener's shrewdness of observation.

"Don't you think I'd better stand firm?" he questioned.

"It may be," said Keener, rubbing his nose reflectively. "I think my first advice is good, though!"

"No one knows me for what I am!"

"I thought so! I thought so!" and the lawyer nodded. "But some things I've heard—"

"Are there really a lot of special police or detectives in the town, Mr. Keener?"

"I've been assured that is the fact!"

As stated, Keener feared little for himself, though he was as guilty a rascal, almost, as was John Marston. But he had so well covered his tracks that he felt quite secure.

"If I fly, though, that will be a confession, Mr. Keener."

"Not necessarily. Cannot you go East on a little business matter? There are some mining arrangements—some sale of stocks or bonds—the organization of a mining company—a thousand and one things, to draw you East for a few days, Mr. Marston. If the weather clears, you can return shortly."

"If it should not, and the barometer still rules low, you have business affairs in London demanding your imperative attention! I wouldn't venture to give advice, perhaps;

I'm merely stating some of the business obligations that I know to be resting on you!

"And there's another thing which makes me glad you came around before your departure!"

He looked Marston smilingly in the eyes, and made a peculiar gesture.

"I thought of that!" Marston lied. "I have the amount here in my pocket."

"It's for that last service rendered you in the Ironclad Mining suit!" Keener suggested glibly.

It was really pay due for helping a member of the Leadville Lions out of an ugly scrape.

"Yes! Yes!" Marston dissimulated. "How much is it Mr. Keener?"

"A thousand dollars!" was Keener's bland reply. "Shall I write you a receipt?"

He turned to the table and took up pen and ink.

Marston hated to pay the amount, knowing it was exorbitant, but he could not afford to higgle or offend Keener by refusing payment now.

He had got together some three or four thousand dollars, in bills, and had them in his purse, at that moment, but a thousand dollars would cut such a hole in the amount, that he winced, even as he replied:

"Yes, make out the receipt! And remember, Keener, that I rely on you to help me out, if I should need you!"

"No client of mine ever needed legal assistance without getting it!" Keener declared.

Then was heard the "scratch, scratch," of his pen on the paper, as he wrote out a receipt for services rendered as the attorney of the Ironclad Mining Company.

This he signed and pushed to Marston; who extracted a thousand dollars, in crisp bills, from his pocketbook, and, with a wince, turned them over to the snaky like little attorney.

"Thank you!" and Keener wadded the bills together and shoved them into his pocket. "And now allow me to observe again that the weather is becoming squally; and a wise captain, in such a time, heads his vessel for some safe port!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

COLORADO CHRIS did not get to speak the words that were on his lips—did not get to warn Arthur and Amy of his belief that they were brother and sister.

A shot, aimed at him as he leaped the rocky barrier, fell within the inclosure, and was productive of marvelous results.

Striking the back wall of the cave, it plunged through, instead of rebounding from, or being flattened by, the hard granite.

The hole made by it was large enough to admit a man's fist.

Colorado Chris, even while Hepburn was rushing excitedly on him, stared at that hole, with wondering gaze. He saw that there was an opening of some character behind the cave.

"I'm all right!" he cried, in answer to Hepburn's rain of questions. "But look at that!"

The excited words brought Jack from the opposite side of the fortress, with Uncle Isaac tumbling after him.

Travers's astonishment was of a petrifying character.

"Hyer we've been this whole day, nigh-about, an' never knowed that!—that wall's a reg'lar shell!"

His pleasure at the return of Colorado Chris was for a moment held in abeyance.

"I couldn't get any one to come with me, but a gentleman named Larson," the big detective hastily explained. "He's out in the valley, somewhere, and I've been hours trying to get in here! John Marston—"

He stopped and glanced at Amy.

"We know about that!" said Hepburn. "He has proved himself a scoundrel, and is not Amy's father!"

Explanations were necessary and were forthcoming.

Colorado Chris could not bear to speak the words that were on his lips. He could not tell these young people that they were brother and sister. Time enough to shatter that dream, when they had not present dangers to contemplate!

That he might not think of it too strongly, himself, he turned to the hole in the wall, made by the bullet.

"Better keep an eye out below, Travers!" he advised. "They may try to make a sneak on us!"

"Yer popper hain't never asleep!" said Travers, sliding back to his post of observation. "If you find a gold mine down there, remember I'm to sheer in it!"

Just then, they preferred to find a way of escape.

And it did seem that this was what might follow.

Colorado Chris set the heel of his heavy boot against the wall, and, when it proved unyielding, he took up a boulder and began to beat at the granite about the small opening.

This yielded better results. The granite was eaten away by the steady pounding, and the hole grew in size.

The excitement of the little party reached fever heat.

Uncle Isaac's cries of delight could not be subdued.

"Don't get excited!" the big detective urged. "We may not find a thing here to give encouragement. There are no indications that this is anything more than a second cave. It may not run to the level, or into the canyon!"

Still, his hopes were great.

The canyon, lying below, and which drained the ravine up which he had crawled, would be an excellent place of concealment, if it only could be gained. However, as its walls were precipitous, it might be as difficult to get out of it as to get in.

Slowly, but surely, the boulder, wielded in his strong hand, ate away the granite, enlarging the opening, until at last, Colorado Chris, crowded through it, to see what lay beyond.

He was gone for more than a minute, having disappeared absolutely in the gloomy place.

Then his encouraging words reached them:

"I believe we've found it! That scamp did us a service, when he shot at me!"

He was back at the opening, and his beaming face told even more than his words.

"If you'll hold those scamps level, Jack, till I thoroughly examine this place!" he called.

"Ay! Ay! I'll do that!"

A pistol-ball flew from Jack's pistol, as a warning to the men on the slope.

"I don't think they'll push the game, yit! They're waitin' fer night, er fer help!"

Again Colorado Chris was gone, and the minutes crept like hours, until his return.

When he came back, he had a joyful communication. The cave, revealed by the bullet, extended and opened into the canyon; and there was every probability that from the canyon a way of escape could be found.

"We'll have to slip out slyly," was his observation, "so that Tempest's men won't know it till we're beyond their reach. There is good fighting ground in there, if we're crowded again!"

The barrier that had stood them in such good stead was abandoned; but not until a dummy man had been rigged up to represent Jolly Jack and thus deceive the enemy.

Then Colorado Chris crawled, for the last time, through the ragged hole, helped Amy through, and the others quickly followed.

Uncle Isaac was as gleeful as a child. This was better than a play;—better, even, than a story-book to the mind infantile. And Uncle Isaac was but a child, mentally.

The cavern led downward, by steep gradients, and over a rough and rocky way. Much toilsome climbing was required, too; but the opening into the canyon was gained at last; and the blessed afternoon sun shone about them, instilling new hope into their hearts.

In fancy, they were already free and safe, and far beyond the power of the man who sought their lives.

All were in jubilant spirits, and Uncle Isaac's prattle was not hushed. There seemed small chance that the old man's talk would be heard by Tempest's men; and they permitted him to revel in the joys of new discoveries and to ramble on at his own sweet will.

Jolly Jack would have given one of his

old-time war-whoops, had not discretion kept him from it. However, he threw up his arms and whispered the yells he dared not otherwise utter.

Amy Marston's face beamed with delight. For the moment, the fact that she was fatherless, that she did not know her own name or parentage, ceased to trouble her.

She leaned on the strong arm of young Hepburn, and was supremely happy.

"I'll never git done kickin' my fool self fer not knowin' there was a hole back o' that wall!" Travers asserted, in his gravest manner. "The idee of a holler like that bein' right there, and Jolly Jack continuing ignerant of it. Beats all."

A long walk was required, and much hard climbing, before they got out of the canyon; but they eventually stood on the level above and saw the open country stretching off toward Leadville.

But their escape had been discovered before that, though they were not yet aware of the fact. And the news of that escape, borne to John Marston in Leadville, was what had brought the look of dismay to his face and the nervous chill of fear to his heart.

Job Tempest's men, as soon as they found that the nest at the top of the hill was empty, streamed through the opening and on into the canyon.

There they picked up the trail of the retreating party.

All was excitement.

The canyon was scaled, and the pursuit began; but so much time had been lost that the party under Colorado Chris was well on the road to Leadville.

Amy rode the big black, which Hepburn caught for her, and the others trudged rapidly along on foot.

And thus, as the sun was descending, and when night was at hand, they drew near Leadville; and there, as if coming out to welcome them, was the force that Donald Truesdale had finally got together.

This force was divided, and half of it, or more, rallied around Hepburn, Uncle Isaac and Amy Marston, and conducted them toward a point of safety.

Meanwhile, John Marston, preparing, at the last moment, to flee from the place, had come out of his house, and turned into one of the principal streets.

He was sighted by Colorado Chris and Jack Travers.

"That man means to leave!" was Colorado Chris's declaration. "We must stop him! He's the King Pin of the Leadville Lions. He must not get away!"

The few adherents of the Leadville Lions who had grouped themselves together, were not willing, at that moment, to cross swords with the force coming up the street.

Most of their friends were still out in the region beyond the town,—hurrying toward Leadville, it is true, but not yet within striking distance.

Colorado Chris, to prevent John Marston from getting out of the town—and knowing that the speedily approaching night would give Marston great advantage—rushed in his direction, after a word of explanation to Donald Truesdale.

Marston saw them, and his fears grew. He saw he would be forced to fight; and, calling two men to him, on whom he thought he could rely, he ran into a back street with them, and climbed to the top of a big building.

This building backed against a hill; and this hill was the point the frightened man wished to reach.

Jack saw Marston and his companions run out on the roof of the house, and recognized their intention.

There were hiding-places among the mines and prospect-holes on the hill toward which Marston was racing.

Travers spoke, calling them to stop, and then his pistol barked, savagely.

For reply, John Marston threw up his right hand, took quick aim, and fired at Travers.

The bullet was aimed all too true truly; and Jolly Jack fell in the dust of the street.

"Curse you!" was the big detective's ejaculation, as he aimed his own weapon at Marston.

Believing that Jack had been killed, the sight of his pard, prone in the street, maddened him.

Then Colorado Chris's revolver cracked, with spiteful and murderous energy!

And John Marston, tossing up his arms, fell from the roof of the high building.

CHAPTER XL.

KNOTS UNTIED.

JOHN MARSTON was dead, and the Leadville Lions, deprived of their King-Pin, and beset by fears, were flying through the night.

But not all of them;—and one of those taken was Job Tempest.

He was now securely confined in the little log jail, where he indulged in maledictions of hate and despair.

Jack Travers was seriously wounded, but the wound was not of a fatal character. Marston's fire had not been as deadly as that of Colorado Chris, for Marston never spoke after touching the ground.

Chris regretted the act, for he would have preferred John Marston a prisoner to John Marston dead. Besides, the slaying of a human being, no matter how vile or wicked that human being might be, was not at all to his taste.

But the deed was done and could not be undone.

After seeing that Jolly Jack had been made comfortable and was in no need of anything, he set out to capture Job Tempest, whose force was then reported coming into the town.

Job was ready to do battle, at first; but when told that Marston was dead—which news was whispered into his ears by a friend—a panic seized him, and he tried to break back into the open country.

But, Truesdale's men surrounded him; and, with Colorado Chris at their head, forced his surrender.

And now, in the solitude of the jail—seemingly abandoned by friends and by fate—he had time to reflect on the events of the past few days, and on the long chain of wickedness that had led up to this.

Colorado Chris visited him there, in search of information; but Tempest was angrily and abusively obstinate, and would say nothing to relieve the big detective's curiosity.

In the morning, a body, swinging from a beam of the jail, was all that remained of Job Tempest.

He had called for ink and pen in the night, and, on the little table furnished him, was found a letter, in the nature of a confession.

That letter made clear the mysteries that had so long troubled the characters, or many of the characters, of this story.

Job Tempest was *not* John Munden, of England; but had long been in the pay of that individual, who was none other than John Marston.

Marston had not killed Lord Wildmere and his daughter, though paid by Albert Hepburn to do so. His fears had been too great. He had simply hired Job Tempest to care for the old man and keep him a prisoner; and also to keep and care for Lord Wildmere's infant daughter, known afterward to the reader as Nellie Tempest.

Tempest's cruelties, and the hard bondage to which Lord Wildmere was subjected, had sapped Wildmere's mental energies, until he became the prattling, childish old man called Uncle Isaac.

Tempest, warned by Marston, who had received letters from Albert Hepburn, giving information that Arthur was coming for the purpose of clearing up the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Lord Wildmere, had endeavored to kill Arthur, as related in early chapters of this story.

He had been paid for these attempts; and the letter discovered by Nellie had been one written by Albert Hepburn to Marston (or Munden, to give him his true name!) and by Munden turned over to Tempest.

From other sources, it was learned that Amy Marston was a daughter of Marston, by a former marriage. Amy's mother had, however, been dead many years.

Albert Hepburn, who had played so infamous a part, warned by a letter from Leadville, fled from England, to avoid arrest and imprisonment. Forced in his haste to abandon everything, he became a wanderer, whose after fate was never known.

Lord Wildmere never recovered the use of his mental faculties, through treated by the most skilled practitioners of England; but sunk gradually, and died two years later.

A year before Lord Wildmere's death, Amy Marston became the wife of Arthur Hepburn.

Nellie Wildmere married the man of her choice, Donald Truesdale—hot-headed, lion-hearted Donald—who, contrary to the expectations of many, made her life happy by loving kindness and disinterested devotion.

They did not leave the mountains—except for a trip to England—preferring the surroundings they had known so long to life anywhere else.

Arthur, when he assumed the estate and title of Lord Wildmere, at his fathers' death—and when Albert had been decreed dead in law by a court of competent jurisdiction—amply provided for his sister and his sister's husband; and Donald became a leading mine owner of the little city of his adoption.

Jolly Jack Travers recovered fully, and continued to follow his chosen calling of detective, achieving notable success in the running down of criminals.

Finally—and this has been reserved to the last—as it was last to come to the knowledge of many of the characters portrayed herein—a brother of the elder Lord Wildmere, a resident of India from boyhood, was revealed in the person of Colorado Chris!

THE END.

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